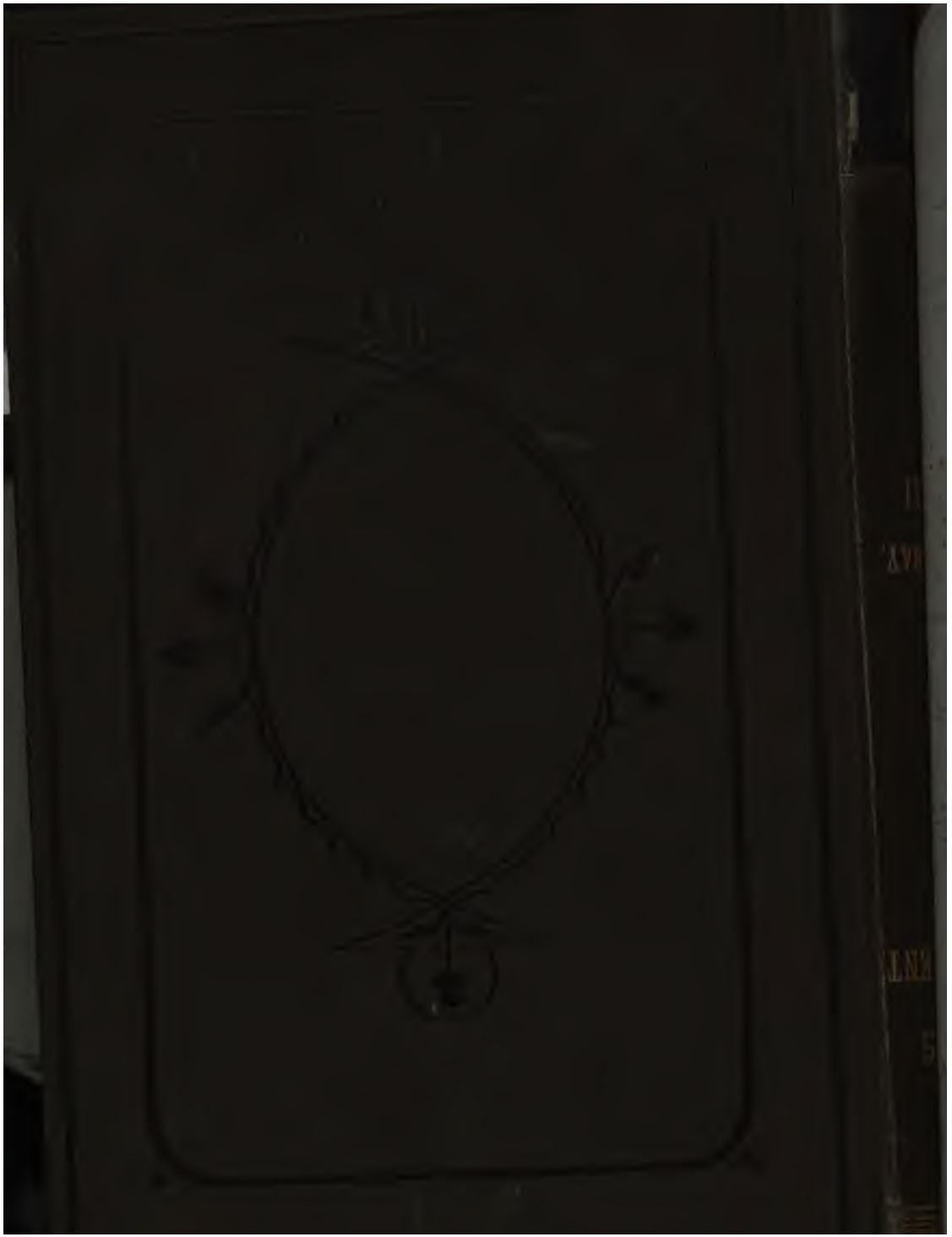

A LIFE'S ATONEMENT.

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A NOVEL.

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A LIFE'S ATONEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

'Jack,' said Polly, suddenly breaking into sobs, 'don't be an angel.'

I REMEMBER how the darkness swallowed up those two flying figures, and I recall the blank of waiting terror which ensued. I remember the hurry and bustle in the house, the lanterns flitting to and fro in the fields, the faint cries of the distant searchers as they hallooed to each other. The lights flickered here and there, and the voices called, until the trees about the lawn grew black with the darkness of the night. Then the search was given up, and Cousin Will came back to the

house with the serving-men behind him. Gascoigne had slipped out, and I was left alone. The terror I was in was mingled with the keenest watchfulness, and I could swear now, after all this lapse of time, to the merest incident or sound of that dreadful hour. The little room grew darker and more terrible, but I could not have moved from it to save my life. There seemed a heavy horror in the air, which compassed me round about and weighed me down like the fear in a dream; and when at last Aunt Bertha entered with a lamp, the rush with which this horror deserted me was too great a thing for a child's nerves to bear. The soul is able to carry such and such a burden, and no more. If Nature or Circumstance lay another feather's weight upon it, the soul evades the burden and slips into oblivion, as mine did then.

I suppose that the seeds of fever must have been within me when this shock came, and that with or without it I should certainly have had to face an illness sooner or later. But with the shock they sprang to life at once, and for many and many a day the outer world was dark to me. I know now that my delirium lasted six weeks; but in fever, the

time which sane mortals count by goes for nothing. I lay in pitch-black darkness for whole eternities, and the solar system has no space for the vast distances which separated me from the only thing which had survived with me the wrack and ruin of the universe. That other survival was an unimaginable fear, which through eternities of space and time grew nearer, with such a horrid, unrelenting, purposed slowness as no sane words or thoughts have power to picture. There I lay and waited, whilst from uncounted æons of space beyond the extinguished sun this hideous terror crept and crept, nearer, and nearer, and nearer. And I never knew at any second throughout these lingering ages, but that the hoarded and eternal hate it held might not flame out against this black delay of dread, and be at once upon me. And I knew then as well as I know now, that the terror was nothing more or less than the stranger's face.

At the end of all this, I remember falling, very slowly indeed, into some great gulf of night, which hid me from that overmastering awe, and closed softly over me with such a benediction of rest and sleep as only a re-

turn from madness ever knew. And into this blessed gulf of forgetfulness I sank so far, that when I woke again the very shadow of my fear was gone. I heard the gurgle of water, and lay with closed eyes and listened. There was the rustle of leaves somewhere near, and the whispering sound of a woman's dress, and the quiet step of a woman's feet were close to me. Something cool and soft touched my forehead—a woman's hand. A cool drink was put to my lips, and I do not believe that ever an Arab pilgrim found a draught more sweet at the desert well. It is worth while to have been ill to experience the first delights of getting well again. I did not open my eyes to see who administered the draught; I was too utterly weak to be curious. When, after another blessed restful sleep, my eyes opened of themselves, I saw that I was in my own bedroom, with its sloping roof, and the honeysuckle was murmuring and bowing at the window. My nurse, whoever she might be, sat at the window looking out upon those wide-spread fields which I could see in languid fancy as I lay. What made the languid fancy clearer was that I could hear the village lads at cricket.

I knew the crack with which bat and ball came together, though it was faint with distance; and the murmurous voices of the players floated in at the open casement as though they were part of the perfume of the fields.

My attendant moved noiselessly in her chair, and drawing a letter from her pocket read it through. I meantime perused her face, and read no line of anything but good there. It was a face of singular beauty, or seemed so to me, and its chief characteristic was a sort of ineffable, gentle softness. It was a face in which the weakest and poorest thing that breathes, the most timid and most helpless, might have had instant faith and trust. It was so gentle and tender in its look, so harmless and so sad, that it filled me, though I lay there as a sick child, and nigh death's door, with a sense of pity and affection, and a vague feeling of desire to protect and defend. We grow backward in wisdom as we leave childhood behind us, because we leave intuition and trust to observation. And most of all we lose, in losing that wisdom of affection which makes the child so far better a creature than the accomplished man or woman. I knew already the look of patient

sorrow in the eyes of age, and it needed no more than even my childish experience of the world to know that such a look was as piteous as it is happily uncommon in the eyes of girlish beauty at eighteen. That grief should visit the loveliest eyes can hardly be surprising even to a child; but that grief should have made such eyes her home, I knew to be out of the natural course of things. There was no mistaking the sorrow of this face, for any guest of Fancy's who came to spend a casual hour and say good-bye. It was too plain that the guest had stayed there long, and made a home there. Looking at that face now in the afterlight of later years, I can see the traces of Sorrow's old abode. As I lay looking at her, my attendant put the letter in her bosom, and sat still with her hands clasped on her lap, and one or two large silent tears ran down her cheek. A low and timid rap came to the door; and wiping her eyes hastily, she arose and moved noiselessly across the room. There was a whisper at the door; she answered 'Yes' in a voice which sounded softer than the whisper, and I was left alone. I fell asleep again, and awoke in the night.

A shaded lamp was on the table, and in the grate, a bright but small fire was burning. Beside the fire was a figure so homelike and familiar, that for a minute I almost fancied myself back in the old cottage in the Black Country.

'Sally!' I said, in a voice so weak and ghostlike that I myself scarcely heard it.

But Sally heard it, and turned an anxious face towards me. God bless the face! Plain as it was, love and sorrow dwelt there too, and made it lovable. She rose and came to me, and smoothed my hair and kissed me. I could see that she was greatly moved; but she struggled hard to hide the joy and agitation which this first sign of returning consciousness had brought to her.

'Oh, Johnny!' she said in a whisper, and then gave a great gulp. 'Go to sleep, dear. There's a darling. You know me again now, Johnny—don't you?'

'Yes,' I said, in that phantom voice the fever had left me.

She stroked my hair again, and resumed her seat by the fireside. But she could not rest there. She came back again, and sat down by the bedside, and took my hand be-

neath the bedclothes, and held it. I dozed, and woke to find her there. I dozed again, and woke to find her there. The faithful creature never moved from that affectionate guard except to smooth my pillow or to give me drink. After a fever, one's capacity for sleep is amazing. I fell into sound slumber at last, still holding Sally's hand; and when I awoke again it was broad daylight, and the sad and gentle presence of yesterday was there once more. I could almost have believed that my interview with Sally had been a dream; for there sat my attendant as if I had only closed my eyes upon her for a second, reading a letter at the window; and the sad attitude of her figure and the expression of her face were as unchanged as if she had been a picture. I moved involuntarily, and she arose and came to me.

'Are you thirsty, dear?' she asked.

'No,' I answered, in a stronger voice than I had been able to find the night before; 'I am very hungry.'

'That's right,' she said. 'Wait a minute, and you shall have breakfast.'

With a caress she went away; and returned after a brief absence with beef-tea and jelly

and some long strips of thin toast. In the rear came Sally; and my attendant turning round upon her said,—

'You ought to be in bed, Troman.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Sally in a whisper; 'but let me see him eat a bit, Miss—just a bit—only a little piece, Miss.'

The young lady smiled at this; and I thought then that, but for the lasting sorrow in her eyes, the smile would have been a very bright and merry one. It seemed at least as though it had a native right to be so; but the abiding sorrow held it down, and made it sadder than her sadness.

Sally held me up in bed, with a shawl wrapped round me, whilst the young lady fed me. I have eaten good dinners in good company since then, but I have never since found food so sweet. For a day or two all my chronicle is of eating and drinking and sleeping. Had food and drink and couch been the poorest and coarsest of their kind, I should have found them all enjoyable in the full tide of returning health; but as it chanced that they were of the best that love and money could procure, I revelled in them with absolute physical enjoyment. Sally and the new

unknown lady and Aunt Bertha and Cousin Will and Gascoigne, all visited me frequently; and in the presence of each I found a feast of heart, which made that slow convalescence one of the happiest experiences of my life. I learned by-and-by that my new friend's name was Maud, and I could but notice that she and I were included in a common pity and tenderness. People lowered their voices to speak to her, as though she too were weak, and coming slowly back from some heavy illness.

On all half-holidays Gascoigne came to me, with news of my school-fellows — who was trying for this prize and who for that—who was captain of the second cricketing eleven, who made top score, and who took most wickets in the last match against the neighbouring school at Dean. He was an enthusiastic cricketer, and I knew how much he sacrificed in spending all these summer afternoons with me; but he would not be forbidden.

The last of all my little circle to be admitted to my chamber was Polly. The doctor had decided that I might be taken down-stairs next day. He was an odd-looking man, the

doctor; not unlike a jackdaw; and he stood by my bedside with a bird-like eye upon me, when the door opened, and Sally made a dart at it with a warning finger raised. 'Aha!' he said—'the little lady. Let her come in, nurse. Let her come in.'

Polly came in, with round blue eyes wide open; and climbing the bed, gravely sat down upon the pillow.

'Nurse,' said the doctor, limping across the room, 'you will ask this young lady to be very quiet, if you please.—You will be very quiet, won't you?' He turned on Polly with his bird-like eye, and using his club-foot as a pivot to turn on. 'Eh, my dear? Eh?'

Polly nodded gravely.

'That's well,' said the doctor, and pivoted himself round on Sally. 'No draughts to-morrow, nurse. We mustn't have the little man catch cold.'

Pursued by Sally with assurances that the greatest care should be taken of me, the doctor limped from the room, and Polly and I were left alone. In answer to all I asked her, Polly said simply 'Yes' and 'No,' and comported herself altogether with a most supernatural and weighty gravity. The evening was ad-

vancing, and the room was growing grey with twilight. Since I had ceased to question Polly, she had never spoken a word. I was a little wounded. Perhaps illness had made me fretful and exacting, but I could not help thinking that Polly might have been better pleased to find me growing well again. We kept silence until Sally returned, bearing the lamp with her.

'Now, Miss Mary,' said Sally, 'it's pretty nigh time as you was in bed.'

'I s'an't go to bed,' Polly answered with calm decisiveness; and looking at her then, I saw that she had been crying, and was crying still.

'Why, Miss Mary,' said Sally, 'you wouldn't make a worrit in Master Johnny's room, I'm sure, an' him that poorly?'

'Jack,' said Polly, suddenly breaking into sobs, and flinging herself upon the bed, 'don't be an angel! Oh, don't, don't, Jack!'

'Why, bless your pretty little heart alive, my darlin', no!' ejaculated Sally, raising her.

But Polly would have the assurance from my own lips, and I gave it seriously. I was as unconscious of any element of comedy in that assurance as Polly herself was.

'They'm hearts o' gold,' said Sally caressingly—'they'm hearts o' gold, they am, both on 'em.'

'If oo goes for an angel,' said Polly fixedly regarding me, 'I'll never be a good girl any more.' Then she relaxed, and kissed me fondly; and I again announced my intention not to be an angel, and so we said good-night.

Next morning I was dressed and carefully wrapped up and carried down-stairs like a parcel. I had not seen Mr. Fairholt since the beginning of my illness, and I have learned since then that he had asked no questions about me, and had been apparently oblivious of my existence. When I saw him that day, I was amazed to find how old and grey and withered he had grown. He looked as if he had been as near death's door as I had. I took occasion to ask Sally if he had been ill. She shook her head in answer, and said 'No;' but I heard her murmur something about a 'peck of trouble' and 'poor old gentleman,' as she turned away.

Later in the day, when Maud was reading to me, and Polly was sitting on a footstool at my feet, Cousin Will came in, and stayed to hear the finish of The Ugly Duckling. When

the story was read through, Maud crossed over to him and sat beside him in the window-seat. They spoke together in low tones for a time; but I heard one fragment of their talk.

'It is possible,' he was saying, 'that we may learn something from him.'

'I fear not,' Maud answered.

'We must wait awhile,' said Cousin Will.

'It would be unwise,' said Maud, 'to question him until he grows stronger.'

There they both looked at me, and I saw that the latter part of their conversation referred to me. Next day Maud said 'Good-bye,' and I was wheeled to the window to see Cousin Will drive her home. She had promised that she would come again and see me very soon; but a fortnight elapsed before we met again. I had not even then recovered my full strength, but all fear of a relapse was long since over; and Sally had told me in the morning that I was to have a good long drive that day. Maud came in a dainty little carriage, drawn by two charming ponies. She had driven alone, as I learned that she was fond of doing; but when we went away together, Cousin Will came with us. I was well wrapped up, and the autumn air was balmy and

warm. Oh, the quiet yet exquisite delight of that escape from prisoning walls—the rousing motion as the two bay ponies swept along! The jingle of their harness made a merry tune, and their feet came down in time to it, and the wheels hummed to it, and birds and trees warbled and murmured in rare harmony. The free wide fields, the rolling river, and the bounteous air, what fresh delight filled them all! A road, so white it made me wink to look at it as we dashed along in the dazzling sunshine, led us at last to a pair of enormous gates of open ironwork, with much gilded scrollwork, and many gilded spikes—the veritable gates of fairyland they seemed. And a veritable fairyland it seemed within, with the vast house in the distance, whose every window shone so in the sun, that it might have been filled with diamonds and gleamed no brighter; with countless plants and flowers of strange and splendid form and hue on either side, as we swept up the broad path leading to that noble mansion; and far away to the right a lovely sheet of water, with the latest friends of The Ugly Duckling gliding to and fro upon its placid surface. These things all led to one conclusion; and when a gorgeous creature

met us at the door, a being with white hair and white stockings and canary coloured breeches and a sky-blue coat, and instead of ordering us off the premises, received us with all evidence of deep respect, I should have been less than a child had it been less than fairyland, or had Maud been other than a fairy princess.

Within the house we were encountered by a stout elderly man with a bald head and a red face. 'Hallo, Fairholt!' this gentleman shouted. 'How de doo? This the patient, eh? How's the little feller, now?—Better? That's right, Come in an' pick a bit o' somethin' or other. Lunch is on the table, an' I'm hungry enough for ten men. No blessin' like a appetite, when you've got the stuff to let it loose on.' Talking thus he led the way into a great room, before whose glories those of Mr. Fairholt's house grew pale in memory. If I had at this time nothing but memory to fall back upon, I should probably still think this apartment the most magnificent in the world. But my later knowledge of the gilded splendours of Hartley Hall has shown me that they were a little worse than vulgar.

'No news?' said Mr. Hartley—so Will

called him—Maud was mincing chicken on my plate, and the old man gave one swift glance towards her as he said it. Cousin Will shook his head in silence; and I, looking at Maud, saw that her lips trembled faintly.

Mr. Hartley ate gravely for a time, and looking up, caught me in the act of staring at him. He dropped his knife and fork with a crash, and laid his great red hands on the cloth and looked at me. 'By Jove!' he said slowly, looking round at Will and Maud, 'I never see such a likeness in all my life afore. Never!'

'Such a likeness, uncle?' said Maud. 'Where?'

'Wheer?' said Mr. Hartley. 'Why theer.' And taking up his knife again, he pointed at me. 'Why, he's the very livin' image.'

'Be calm, Mr. Hartley,' said Cousin Will, rising and walking round the table to me. 'You alarm the child. He is far from strong yet.'

'Calm!' said Mr. Hartley, taking up his fork and attacking his plate again. 'I'm calm enough. But it's *the* most extr'ordinary strikin' likeness I ever set eyes on in all my born days.' He looked at me again and arose from the table.—'Take care o' the little chap, Maud,'

he said with a gentleness which contrasted strongly with the haste with which he had arisen.—'Here, come with me, Fairholt; I want to speak to you a minute.'

Will left me with a reassuring pat upon the shoulder, and followed Mr. Hartley to the far-end of the room, where they talked eagerly together for five minutes.

'I'll tell you what I'll do,' said Will, as they came away together towards the table; 'I'll drive over at once and bring her with me.'

'Finish your lunch first,' said Mr. Hartley, ringing the bell.—'Order the dog-cart round at once,' he called to the servant almost before the door was opened.

The meal was finished in silence. The footman announced that the dog-cart was in readiness; and Mr. Hartley and Cousin Will left the room together. Maud, in evident surprise and wonder, led me to a couch near the window, and made me lie down there in the sunshine, setting up a firescreen to shade my face.

'Are you strong enough to talk, dear?' she asked me.

I answered that I felt quite strong and well.

'Shall you be troubled if I ask you what

frightened you on the night when you fell ill?'

'No,' I answered. 'I saw a face at the window.'

'Gascoigne, your playfellow,' she went on, 'says that you cried out, "The face!" Had you ever seen the face before?'

I told her everything then; much as I have set it down at the beginning of this narrative.

She heard me to the end, and then said with voice and eyes of appeal, 'If ever you should see him again, dear, don't be afraid of him, but speak to him. No, darling, no; he will not hurt you. It is not in his heart to hurt anything. But he is most unhappy —oh, most unhappy! If ever you see him again, speak to him, and tell him that everybody has forgiven him. Tell him that unless he comes back again, our hearts are broken. Tell him that unless he comes back again, I shall die.'

There she fell forward on her knees, and drooped her head against the couch on which I lay, and broke into passionate weeping. The intensity of eagerness with which she had spoken these last words, and the uncontrolled

agony of tears in which she knelt, alarmed me beyond measure. I could think of nothing to be done, except to put my arms round her neck and soothe her, and promise that I would—I would indeed. After a time she cried less passionately; and when she had partly resecured her self-control, she arose. 'Don't tell anybody of this, darling,' she said; 'but never forget what I have asked you.'

I promised faithfully; and she left the room, still crying, but quite quietly. I sat alone, and wondered at it all, as I think I well might. The unaccustomed exercise of the drive, the hearty meal I had eaten after it, and the agitation of mind I had twice experienced, were too much for me, and by-and-by wonder lost itself in sleep. When I awoke there were voices in the room, and I had a shawl thrown over me.

'Oh,' said Mr. Hartley's voice, 'so you've known him since the day he was born, eh?'

'Yes, sir,' said a voice, which I knew at once to be Sally's. 'I dressed him the very second time as ever he was dressed, sir.'

Hearing this, I put aside the shawl which covered me, and sat up. Sally, Cousin Will, and Mr. Hartley were standing together on

the rug before the fireplace, and Sally's face wore an expression of anxiety and fear.

'Did you know his mother before her marriage?' Mr. Hartley asked.

'Yes, sir — pore dear! I did, sir,' Sally answered. 'My mother nussed her when her was a baby.'

'Hay?' said Mr. Hartley. 'What did you say your name was?—Ah, Troman; of course, of course. Are you old Troman's daughter, that lived in the cottage by the quarry?'

'Yes, sir, please sir,' Sally answered, courtesying.

'Well, what was his mother's maiden name?'

'Isabella Hartley, sir,' said Sally.

'Who did she marry?'

'Mr. John Campbell, sir, at the Baker's Green Ironworks, sir,' Sally answered.

'And he's their only child, is he?' Mr. Hartley went on.

'For sure he is, sir,' Sally answered.

'That's what you'd call a chain o' evidence, if you like — ain't it, Fairholt?' said Mr. Hartley, turning round upon Cousin Will, and thrusting a forefinger at his waistcoat.

'It's certainly complete enough,' Will answered.

Mr. Hartley turned back to Sally. 'Did you ever see his mother's brother Ben, young woman? A blackguard bit of a chap, as run away, an' was never heard on for 'ears an' 'ears?'

'I seen him once, sir,' said Sally; 'but I never knowed no harm of him, sir. They was all decent people.'

'What'll you bet you haven't seen him twice?' Mr. Hartley asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

'Well, I never!' said Sally, in a tone of sudden recognition and surprise.

Mr. Hartley burst into a great roar of laughter, and catching sight of me, stopped suddenly. 'An' if here,' he said, 'ain't my newfound nevew a-listenin' to it all! Why, blow me if it ain't as good as a play! Come an' kiss your uncle, Johnny. Bless my heart alive, missis! sit down and have a glass o' wine. Oh, nonsense, nonsense! Don't stand curtcheyin' as if you was afraid o' *me*. Why, you an' me ought to know each other. Your mother and my mother brought me into the world together, between 'em. Well, well, well! Bless my heart alive! An' who'd ha' thought it?'

Sally explained everything to me that afternoon as Mr. Hartley's groom drove us home. When we were landed there, Sally carried me bodily to my bedroom, and setting me down upon the bed, wept over me, according to custom. 'And oh!' she cried, at last, holding me at arm's-length by the shoulders, 'if heaven ain't a-raising up friends for him everywhere.'

My Aunt Bertha went over to Hartley Hall next day, and for a week or two there was a great driving to and fro between the houses. Finally, Sally was added to the list of Mr. Hartley's domestics, on the understanding that she was engaged solely for my behoof and benefit; and I was transferred from the house of Mr. Fairholt to that of Mr. Hartley. Polly and I were alike inconsolable at first; but frequent visits were promised on either side, and once more the barque of Childhood's Hope sailed free before the wind.

CHAPTER II.

HISTORY.

You do not need the sanctities of love to hold you pure in heart, as I do.

FRANK'S picture occupies the place of honour on the walls of the Winter Exhibition of the Associated Brotherhood of British Artists. A clique of Frank's friends and admirers go about town proclaiming the advent of a new Turner; whilst a clique of his detractors go about town proclaiming Frank an impostor, and his picture a pretentious failure. In my capacity as story-teller I have a right to a voice in this matter; and I may take leave to say that the picture is a good picture, and is very near being a great one, and that only a man of genius could have painted it. The World of Fashion, interesting itself in the affairs of British Art, is

divided into hostile camps upon this question; and Frank becomes a Lion, roaring mildly in many drawing-rooms; and being growled at in many others, by lesser Lions envious of his fortune. In this mixed world there are many artists who are not gentlemen, just as there are many gentlemen who are not artists. It is not surprising, therefore, since envy is a human passion, that some few should go about to accentuate the young fellow's triumph by sneering at him as one who paints with ease to show his breeding. Frank is not without a sense of humour; and since he never envied mortal man anything, and envy cannot sting him, he takes the detraction good-humouredly, and the worship with more inward humility than might be believed.

It is a matter to be thankful for, that in this world the best truths are the tritest. We have reason to be thankful that sin brings punishment in its train. If punishment hang fire or miss, it will be the worse for us. If I sin, let retribution lay a hand upon me, that I may thereafter live cleanly and learn wisdom. But let it be that the wisdom shall be early learned, for that man's lot in life is

terrible from whom sorrow slips like water, and who so needs to be drowned in it before his heart is cleansed. I have laboured but in vain to paint this man, if I have not shown already that with him remorse is the gate which leads to folly, as surely as folly is the gate which leads to remorse, and that for him there must be something little less than a convulsion of the universe, before he escapes that Devil's Circle. Since the night when last we saw him, remorse has been busy with him, and he has made a strenuous effort against himself, and has for the most part succeeded in keeping out of harm's way. It is a good sign in him that praise humiliates him inwardly. Most of all he is humbled by Maud's innocent triumph and gratulation, conveyed by the liveried Cupid of the penny-post, and breathing completest faith and love. He wears the locket which holds her portrait, at his heart, and believes in it as a talisman, to save him from all wrong. And now he has been for so long a time upon the straight path, that but for his last folly he would be quite happy and contented.

On the evening of the first day of the Exhibition he had met the Secretary, a sad-eyed and

mournful-mannered man, who was conspicuous as wearing the most shockingly bad hat in London. 'Let me congratulate you, Fairholt,' said the Secretary, speaking as dolefully as though he were bidding farewell before transportation. 'Lord Chesterwood wants your picture, and will give your price for it. I met him an hour after the place had closed.'

'I'm glad to know that Chesterwood likes it well enough to buy it; but I am sorry that I was stupid enough to forget to tell you that it is sold already. It was sold before the Exbibition opened.'

'You're a lucky fellow, Fairholt,' said the Secretary. 'I'll tell his Lordship. Would you take a commission for a *replica?*'

'Not a *replica*,' Frank answered. 'A new work, if you like—and if Chesterwood care for one.'

With that they parted; and Frank strolling homewards, began to think that he had acted foolishly. Tasker's bill for ninety-eight pounds ten shillings was due in three days' time, and he had nothing in hand to meet it with.

'I must look Hastings up,' he said to himself; 'and either assure myself that his man is

certain, or go back to the Secretary and accept Chesterwood's offer at once.'

He called a hansom, and drove to Hastings' rooms. 'I say,' he cried, bursting in suddenly —'about that fellow who was to buy my picture?'

'*What* about him?' answered Hastings, turning languidly on his couch. 'Is he gathered to his fathers? Has he gone a cropper on "Change?"'

'I have come to you,' said Frank, speaking seriously, 'to ask you about him. It is a matter of vital importance, Hastings. That bill of Tasker's is due in three days. I have just had an offer for the picture from Lord Chesterwood; and if I am not absolutely sure of your man, I must accept it. Now, is your man safe to buy the picture, and safe to pay at once?'

'I should say,' responded Hastings with great gravity, 'that so far as the possession of coin goes, the Bank of England is a fool to him. And I should be inclined to fancy that if he lost the chance of buying that particular picture, this hollow world could provide him with no future joy. That indeed is my deliberate conviction.'

'Will you tell me who it is?' Frank asked.

'An oath, an oath!' said Hastings with placid languor. 'I have an oath in Heaven! Shall I lay perjury upon my soul? No; not for Venice!'

'Will you undertake to see the man to-morrow,' Frank urged, 'and ascertain if everything is right, and if his will to buy the picture holds good?'

'Before the morning dew has pleached the lawn?' said Hastings.

'You unpatented Irritator,' cried Frank, shaking him. 'Will you go?'

'Yes; I will,' said the Irritator. 'If not so swift as friendship's heart could hope, as fast as a hackney carriage can carry me.'

'When will you let me know?'

'Before the clock hath struck the hour of noon.'

'That's a promise?'

'And shall be a performance.'

The two shook hands; and Frank regaining his cab, drove home to dress, and then went westward to be lionised.

At an hour much earlier than that at which he usually arose, Hastings took his way to Acre Buildings, City, and was admitted to the presence of Mr. Tasker, who received him with

much cordiality. 'I have called,' said Hastings, business like for once, 'to ask you about that picture of Fairholt's. I know very well that you have a grudge against him, my chosen one; but you mustn't gratify it yet. With a bill against Fairholt in one hand, and a cheque in his favour in the other, you might be inclined to be mischievous. Have you a genuine commission to buy the picture?'

For a second, Tasker felt as though his ground were slipping from beneath him. The usurer needed time to think a little. There could be no harm in letting Hastings see the intending purchaser's name. He made no answer, but rummaged over a file which he took from an iron safe, and having found the letter for which he sought, handed it over to Hastings. The letter was dated from Hartley Hall, and was signed by Benjamin Hartley. It set forth that since the writer designed a surprise for the artist, it was his wish that the purchaser's name should be kept completely in the dark, and it authorised Tasker to offer four hundred guineas for the picture. Whilst Hastings read this over, Tasker produced a copying-book from the press, and laid before him a copy of his own

reply to his patron's missive. Hastings read that also, and professed himself satisfied.

'You won't break your bond with me,' Mr. Hastings?' said Tasker when he had put away the letters.

'A scrupulous adherence to veracity is my sole virtue,' Mr. Hastings responded, with a return to his common manner.

'Yes, I know,' said Tasker, to whom that sentiment might as well have been set forth in Greek; 'but you will keep your promise?'

'Have I not told thee so, thou Hebrew Jew?' said Hastings, seating himself upon the edge of the table.

'Very well—very well,' returned Tasker, waving his hands in a manner half-deprecatory, half-submissive. 'You zay what you like to me; but I will brove that I am your friend. There is drouble in store for you, Mr. Hastings.'

'Your argument is cogent, my Israelite,' said Hastings. 'Experience has taught me to trace the filmy nexus which is here revealed. It's a singular thing, Tasker, that I never had a friend who didn't say that trouble *was* in store for me. Your advancement of that statement is at once admitted as an admirable augury of

the most friendly intentions. I invite you to notice that that sentence is rather well turned than otherwise.'

'You are going to be in great drouble,' said Tasker gravely, 'unless we both dake great gare of you.'

'Then let the stricken deer go weep,' quoth Hastings, and lit a cigar.

'Mr. Hastings,' said Tasker below his breath, 'I have been in great difficulties, and I have had to sell every acceptance that was in my hands.'

'Good,' said the other with an air of approval.

'I have been gompelled to sell yours with the others. And the gentleman was here yesterday to zay that he meant to go for you. Now, Mr. Hastings, this is not my fault. I am a moneylender; but I am not a scoundrel.'

'A nice distinction,' Hastings murmured as if to himself.

'I break my faith by giving you warning. But if you do not wish to be in trouble, you had better be out of the way for a little while. I can only advise you; but I gould not help it. I was obliged to sell.'

Hastings made no response to Tasker's advice or to his professions of sorrow, but

surveyed him with quiet indifference, as though the matter in discussion had no possible concern for him.

'What do you think you shall do?' Tasker asked after a pause.

'I think I shall clear out somewhere, and I think I shall ask you to let me have the money to do it with.'

'I cannot let you have much,' said Tasker, 'but I must do my best.'

Then the two set to work to settle the amount on which Hastings should start for Boulogne, since to that refuge for the oppressed he chose for the moment to fly. It was settled that Tasker should send a weekly remittance so long as he should adjudge it necessary for Hastings to remain abroad, and by way of a beginning that gentleman drew twenty pounds, and made his way merrily to Fairholt's chambers.

'All goes well,' he told Frank. 'I have seen the agent, and I have read the letter of the principal. I suppose you will get your cheque to-morrow or next day.'

'For once intelligible and direct,' cried the artist, clapping him on the shoulder.

'Yes,' said Hastings; 'it's all square, old man, and you may rely upon it.'

'Better and better!' cried Frank, laughing. 'what has worked this conversational conversion?'

'Should you hold the Koh-i-noor — the Fountain of Light itself,' said Hastings with solemnity, 'above the flame of a farthing rushlight, its sparkle would be lost. Rub it even with a damp sponge, and its brilliance partially returns. In this little allegory, *I* appear as the Fountain of Light, you as the damp sponge, and a city agent as the farthing candle. Adieu!'

Hastings went his way; and Frank, easy and satisfied in mind, sat down and penned to Maud the last letter he ever wrote to her. He set down all his hopes and all his love in that letter, not guessing that it was love's last legacy to love. How should he guess it? I cannot tell but before this ink is dry some stroke of terror may have fallen on me. Nor can you who sit at ease beside your fire and read this story make the baldest guess at what the next sixty seconds may do for you. But the proverb is something musty.

'If I were not sure,' Frank wrote, 'that you love me as truly as I love you, I should despair of telling you one thousandth part of what you are to me. And as it is, I shall never tell you all. You do not need the sanctities of love to hold you pure in heart as I do. Though you loved me as woman never loved man before, you can have no such need of me as I have of you. I shall never have courage to tell you of the follies from which you raised me; of the things, worse than follies, from which your love has had power to save me. And I believe, dearest, that if it were possible that by any swift temptation—as God knows, it is possible for most men—I should fall from your good hopes of me, the thought that you had loved me once would draw me back again to penitence and honour. Forgive me if I vex you by throwing even a hint of possible mud upon your idol. If that idol were any other human creature, you should believe in him in peace for me; but you can scarcely guess, Maud, how humble and how undeserving I feel before you. I can bring you nothing that makes me worth your having except my love. But I bring that in full measure, pressed down and

running over. I am all yours, now, and till I die.' This and more he wrote in true love and penitence, and out of the fulness of his heart. There were manlier purposes within him then, than he had ever known before.

At lovers' perjuries, Jove laughs. Ay, well! But if Jove laugh at the vows by which love pledges itself to truth and honour for love's holy sake, or at their woful breaking, then let the meanest creature of the fields deride his thunder. I, for one, will have no such Jove astride on my Olympus.

Frank having despatched his letter, rested with good heart and hope, purposing to make the discharge of Tasker's bill his last business in town. He had no anxieties about that matter. The date for the arrival of the cheque and that for the payment of the bill ran each other a little close, to be sure; but then there was the time-honoured three days' grace, and he had Hastings' full assurance of the *bona fides* of the unknown purchaser. But the day of reckoning came and went, and no cheque reached him. He went to look for Hastings, and found that he had left town and had given no address. Then, sorely against the grain,

he went to visit Tasker. The money-lender lay in wait for him.

'I must ask you,' said Frank, 'to renew that bill for a month.'

Tasker regretted politely that it was not possible. He was already almost a ruined man—he had not twenty pounds in the world. He set forth these statements with more sorrow for Mr. Vairhold than for himself. He would have liked to have helped the gentleman.

'This is all nonsense, of course,' said Frank. 'I suppose you want a heavier interest. How much do you want?'

No; Tasker wanted nothing but his money. He was broken—he was ruined. There was nothing before him but the workhouse.

'Make the bill a hundred and twenty-five, and make it payable in a month?' Frank asked.

No; it was not possible. Tasker actually turned his back upon him, and sorted a set of dusty papers.

'Make it a hundred and fifty, payable in a month,' Frank urged.

Then Tasker turned, with insolent triumph peering through humility. Was the gentleman

deaf? It had been said already that the thing was impossible. Tasker wanted his money, and nothing but his money. He was bankrupt without it, and he must have it.

'I am in hourly expectation of more than four hundred pounds,' Frank pleaded.

Tasker trusted it would arrive in time to prevent any unpleasantness, holding meanwhile in his hand the pocket-book which held Benjamin's Hartley's cheque in favour of Frank Fairholt for four hundred guineas. It would not be easy to say how much Mr. Tasker enjoyed this stroke of vengeance.

'What shall you do if the bill is allowed to be finally dishonoured?' Frank asked him.

Tasker—with the joy of gratified malice brightening his eyes and creasing his lips into their own carnivorous smile, in spite of all he could do to clothe his face in proper sadness—regretted deeply that he could only get some wealthy friend to take it up and appeal to Frank's family.

'If you can get any one to take it up, bring him to me, and I will pay him any reasonable sum he may ask to renew it.'

Then Tasker landed his final blow. 'I have told you already, Mr. Vairhold, that I am

almost a ruined man. Well now you shall know. I am guite ruined. I gannot help it. I have sold your bill into other hands. It is not in my hands any longer; I have nothing more with it.'

Frank regarded him for a minute sternly and thoughtfully. You want your revenge for the insult I put upon you last summer,' he said quietly, but with a feeling of hopeless desperation. 'Is that it?'

'Look you, Mr. Vairhold,' said Tasker, laying his hand on Frank's sleeve, if I could—'

'Stand back, if you please,' said Frank quietly, regarding the smile which now shone unrestrained on Tasker's face.

'If I could pay myself,' Tasker began again, retiring a little, 'for the money I have lent, I should not gare about revenge. But I will have one or the other. If my friend comes to me and says, "You have sold me a rotten bill, and told me it was a good one," then I will not sbare you—no, not a minute. Look you, my young friend—' Tasker laid a hand on Frank's arm again.

The words, the smile, the touch roused Frank into the feeling of disgusted rage one feels at an intruding snake, and in his instinc-

tive passion he struck the Jew across the face with the cane he carried in his hand.

Tasker sprang back with a yell which brought in the office-boy. 'Fetch a policeman!' screamed Tasker with a face livid with rage, except for the red bar across his cheek. Frank sat down with blind passion surging in his heart. Tasker placed his back against the door and glared at Frank, who took up a newspaper from the table and made a feint of reading it. In a minute or two the boy returned with an officer, who listened with imperturbable official calm to Tasker's statement, and then turned to Frank.

'I have punished this person for a gross impertinence,' said that young gentleman with quiet hauteur. 'There is my card, officer. I shall be quite ready to appear at the proper time and place.'

'Very good, sir,' said the officer.

'Take him in charge!' Tasker screamed—'take him in charge!'

'You have my address,' Frank said quietly to the policeman.

'You'd better summons the gentleman,' said the officer to Tasker.

'No!' Tasker screamed; 'he shall go to prison.'

The official smiled; and Frank walked unmolested from the room and into the street.

Tasker threatened to report the officer for refusing to do his duty. The officer, with sublime calm, asked if Tasker had the gentleman's address. Yes; he had. Very well then; so had the officer. And with that the officer also walked downstairs and into the street. Tasker raged alone, and swore to a thousand horrible revenges. But when his mood had cooled a little, he rejoiced savagely that Frank had given him thus a further chance for revenge. He could guess pretty well what it would be to Frank to have his name dragged first through the mud of a trial for assault, on a police-court summons, and next through the daily columns of the press. He ground his teeth and clenched his hands in savage exultation over that charming prospect. With a passion of rejoicing hatred, he took from his pocket-book the cheque for four hundred guineas, and gloated over it.

That Frank should regret the violence into which the passion of the moment had betrayed him, was inevitable; but his regret brought but little added pain to him. Now that he knew how inexorable Tasker had meant to be

from the first, he saw that with or without the blow, his case was hopeless so far as the money-lender's influence could go. He was torn with suspense and anguish. The trouble of this unhappy bill magnified itself until it assumed gigantic proportions. Unless it could be met, his father and his brother would each see how he had gone back from his better promises. Maud too — might it not reach her ears? There was an almost unbearable horror in the thought. He had promised so much—he had meant so well—he had fought so hard against the temptations which beset him, and now, a single night of folly had brought him to this. How could he have been such an insensate fool as to place himself in this man's clutches after having purposely insulted him. O fool! he groaned. Money borrowed drunkenly to pay a gambling debt. A debt contracted, too, in such a place and with such people. Could he go down and see Will, and make a clean breast of it, and beg him once more to help him? There was scarcely time for that; but even if there had been, how could he so humiliate himself? No, no, no, no! A thousand times, No!

There was yet one loophole of escape. To

trust longer to the possible receipt of a cheque from a man whose name he did not even know, was out of the question. That had been madness from the first. That hope was the weakest of all broken reeds, and he could lean no longer on it. But there was still Lord Chesterwood's offer, and its recollection came upon him as a ray of light might fall upon the way of safety to one who lay awaiting death in the dark. He arranged his disordered hair and dress, and hurried to the building in which the Exhibition was held. There he found the Secretary, and as calmly as he could set before him the fact that the contract of which he had previously spoken had been made with a man upon whom he could not depend. He should be delighted to sell the picture at once to Lord Chesterwood. His Lordship, the Secretary said, had gone on public business to St. Petersburg. Hadn't Frank seen that in the papers?—No? How very singular. Great pity to deal with unsafe men. Quite easy to demand a cheque in advance. Lots of people did it, and— Good-day, Fairholt.

No hope—no hope now. Was there any chance of finding Hastings? Away to his rooms once more. No news of him or of

his whereabouts. Frank went home again, and poured out a great tumbler of brandy, and drank it. Then he sat down to think; but thought was insupportable. The thought of his father's distress, his brother's contempt —and of Maud—O Maud, Maud!—and her love for him tried by this vile revelation, and her heart bruised by it—it was all too terrible. He took up his pen, and tried to write to his father, and tell him of the miseries which surrounded him, and how they arose. He would have to know, and it was better that he should hear from the culprit—the criminal—yes, the criminal—himself. But Frank tore up letter after letter, and at last gave up all attempt to perform that bitter task. After awhile, he poured out another glass of brandy and drank it, put on his hat and overcoat, and wandered aimlessly into the rain. The winter afternoon was closing in, and the lamps were already gleaming ghastly in the fading light. It was all the same to him where he walked, and he gave no heed to the direction in which he travelled. His feet kept pace with his own fierce and bitter thoughts. But a man must walk fast indeed to outwalk his sorrows. To-morrow, this

Nemesis of his folly would be upon him. If Fate's hand could have fallen then, striking him dead, he would have esteemed himself happy if only he could have been saved this cruel but well-earned shame, and if they who loved him could have been spared the anguish of seeing him so shamed.

I have been looking at the trouble through his eyes, and not my own, all this time. It was not so vast as it seemed to him; but it is easy to philosophise on others' sorrows—even for a fool—hard as it is for the man who suffers to bear his suffering calmly, even though he be a philosopher. And poor Frank, with no one near him to philosophise for him, and with no power of control within, went the way on which his own desperation led him. And that way was the more piteous and desperate because all that was good in him drifted him towards it, and all that was weak in him beckoned him inexorably on.

CHAPTER III.

HISTORY.

Every man plays Hercules at one time or another.

HASTINGS packed up such of his belongings as seemed needed for a sojourn of a month at Boulogne, and sat down upon his bedside, with a big portmanteau in front of him and a big cigar in his mouth, to look out the train for Dover. The prospect of the jaunt was pleasant to him. As for his debts, they were such old friends that he would have been almost grieved to part with them. Natively, there was no honester man in Europe than this flippant and idle young gentleman. Tick at Eton and tick at Cambridge had dulled his moral perceptions—that was all. It would be unfair to blame the man for the faults of a whole system. He had been steeped in credit ever since he had been a little boy. That

everybody would be paid and exceedingly well paid one day or other, went of course without saying. The young gentleman justified himself after his usual fashion. 'The poet remarks with great felicity that there is no joy but calm. Very well, then. It is the business of every man to preserve his life from all fluctuations, and to hold himself at one level. Happy is the man who has no history. My highly superior father holds me in poverty at this time, and will one day burden me with great wealth. It is my double duty to get into debt. To-day's debt feeds yesterday's depletion, and provides a relief beforehand for the repletion of to-morrow. Aha! 'Tis quaintly, wittily, and wisely put. Credit is the compensating balance of the whole system of human affairs. Good again.'

Resuming the study of the time-table, suspended on behalf of these reflections, Hastings was startled by an unusually imperious knock at the front door. A foreboding touched him in the midst of his easy gaiety. The door below was opened, and by-and-by the neat and rosy housemaid appeared with a message for him, to the effect that Mr. Robins, of Deal, desired to see him.

'Robins of Deal, and Robins of Deal,' said Hastings rhythmically in a sort of pensive chant. 'And who the dickens is Robins of Deal?—Show the Old Gentleman up, my dear, as the ardent inquirer said to Cornelius Agrippa.'

The rosy housemaid, who was of opinion that Mr. Hastings was the most perfect of his sex, turned up the sitting-room lamp and went down stairs. Then the visitor came up with solemn tramp; and Hastings walking airly into the sitting-room, saw before him an old and faithful servitor of his father's—a servitor so old that he had been pantry-boy in the great house at Dean when his present master was a boy at Eton.

'Why, Roberts, my good old boy,' said Hastings, shaking hands with him, 'what brings you to the brick and mortar wilderness? The girl said Mr. Robins, of Deal, wanted to see me.'

'I told her to say it was Roberts from Dean, Mr. Arthur,' said the old man solemnly.

'I am very glad,' said Hastings, looking with real pleasure at the white-haired, rosy, plump old fellow's face—'very glad indeed you found me. I am just off for the Continent.'

'You must come back with me, Mr. Arthur,' said the old man with a solemn shaky voice.

'Is there anything the matter at home?'

'It is appointed to all men, Mr. Arthur,' said the ancient butler with a voice more and more tremulous. 'It's your poor father's turn, sir, now.'

Hastings sat down without an exclamation, and looked hard at his visitor.

'He wouldn't have any of us wire, sir,' said the old man, 'for fear of startling you. A letter wouldn't have reached you till the morning, and that might have been too late. So he said to me, "Go and bring him down, Roberts. I shall last till *he* comes," he said, sir; "I *must* last till he comes!"'

Hastings still said not a word, but rang the bell. The rosy housemaid answering stood astonished at the paleness of his countenance. He ordered refreshments to be placed before the butler, and then left him and went into the solitude of his bedroom. Standing there, and staring listlessly into the dark and silent street, he groped in his own mind for the meaning of the message which had just been brought to him. He turned his eyes vacantly upon the table near which he stood, and took

thence a book in a yellow paper cover, and vacantly read a paragraph. This book was the production of a Frenchman of genius. I will not blame but pity that great personage, who was a godless, heartless, bloodless cynic, with a rollicking sense of humour which never found food for a smile in anything that was not either cruel or dirty. The paragraph which Hastings thus vacantly read set forth with jocund pleasantries the delight experienced by a young man at a wealthy father's death. As the meaning of the writer became clear to him, he tore the flimsy volume passionately in pieces and dropped them on the floor. The old man tapped at the door, but Hastings did not hear him. He gazed gloomily out of the window on the dark street until the old servitor's touch aroused him. 'Roberts,' he said, with some bitterness at heart, 'I declare I feel this almost as much as you do.'

'I know, Mr. Arthur,' said the butler. 'There's different ways of feeling, and different ways of showing it.'

'Is there no hope of his recovery?' Hastings asked, turning again to the window.

'No hope at all, sir,' the butler answered.

'When does our train start?' Hastings asked again.

'I've told Hoskins to meet the Hetherton train, one hour and twenty minutes after midnight, sir,' the butler answered. 'It leaves Euston in about an hour and a half.'

'Very well,' said Hastings. 'Leave me alone for a minute or two, Roberts. Get something to eat. I shall be quite ready.

The butler retired; and Hastings stared on vacantly through the window. 'Have I a heart at all?' he asked himself. 'I don't believe I care the toss up of a blind beggar's farthing. I don't believe it's in me to care; and if it isn't, it shall not be in me to pretend I care. Poor old governor! He'd have cared if he'd heard that *I* was dying.'

His heart was hardened, and his eyes were dry. He thought of things which were so ridiculous that he could have laughed outright at them. The great Frenchman himself could not have been inwardly wittier than poor Hastings, over all the cruelties of his own want of feeling. He could not help it for his life. He could not feel sorry. He did not feel sorry. He was never merrier than at this time; and just as he had arrived at

this conclusion, he dropped his head into his hands and wept bitterly. He was a very young man, you will remember, and his father, who lay dying, had loved him well and forgiven him often. The faithful old servitor without, dropped tears into his tea as he sat in his young Master's room, and heard the sobs which shook him.

The two mourners took the train together, and arrived too late. The old man was dead; and his son, that dissipated youngster, was master of Dean Manor and broad lands adjoining. Yet it was not these things which filled the heart which would have fain believed itself so flippant and cynical. No, no! He lay there, the grey old man, who would be grieved no more, yet had been grieved so often. Even cunning Antony cries out, 'My heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar, and I must wait till it come back to me.' There was some nature there, or the mob would not have been moved by it. And so Hastings' heart lay there with the dead father, and had no concern with Dean Manor and broad lands adjoining, unless it were to fear in the sincerity of grief that these things would bring in time a consolation of which it would be an honest

man's duty to feel ashamed. The will of the dead man was read after the funeral, and except for liberal legacies to the old servants, everything came into the hands of the son. He was free to go back now and use London like a hog-pen or other place to wallow in. He could give his vices that looked like virtues, and his virtues that looked like vices, full swing on such a princely income as his father had left him.

I would defy you to make a Square-toes of this young gentleman, but he is not past making an honest man of. The father's death sobered the son, and brought responsibilities upon him. The old fables are full of wisdom. Every man plays Hercules at one time or another, if it be but for an hour, and the two goddesses solicit him. Happy is he who plays the parable through to the end, and chooses after Hercules his fashion. That better choice our young Hastings made. It was not in the heart of him to be a Pharisee. He will have his joke to the end of his life, and will not forget, though he grow wise, the flavours of Clos de Vougeot and Habana. There will be cakes and ale even for him who is pious, and ginger shall still be hot in the mouth.

But there is a time for all things, and this was the time for sober thought and honest resolution. He would play Prince Hal no more. Brookes and Bonder, Poins and Bardolph, and that hoary sinner Falstaff, who dwelt in the dingy parlour of the fancy public, that battered hero of the fistic ring, should have seen the last of the Prince's revelry. To purge, to quit sack, and live cleanly—it is a holy task, and the young fellow who goes out to it will have all honest men's sympathy.

Hastings could not bear to closet himself with his dead father's lawyer directly after the old man had been laid beside his ancestors in the family vault. He felt that he could better give himself a little time for thought, and even a little time for grief, before he took up the burdens of his new position. And there seemed to him a something sordid in hastening to lay hands upon that which bore yet freshly the impress of a hand which could grasp earthly riches no more. Therefore he went up to London, and whilst old acquaintances read gleefully that the will was proved, and that the personalty was sworn under some quite exceptional number of thou-

sands, he was living alone and thoughtful in his old London rooms. It happened on the night on which he returned to town that he thought of Frank, and took a cab to drive round to him. 'It was more than half my fault,' he thought to himself, 'that Fairholt fell into that man's hands. If he is in any trouble, I must help him out of it.'

And once more he found himself too late. Mr. Fairholt had just gone out. Hastings then pencilled this brief note :—

'DEAR FAIRHOLT,—If you are in any trouble about Tasker, let me know. One word from me will quiet him. Yours always, A. H.'

This he folded and sealed, and having discharged his duty in that one matter, went home again. Cynical and flippant as he thought himself, his heart was very tender just then, and the look even of lifeless things touched him. The walls that had heard his follies reproached him. He arose and went into the streets. It rained in a half-hearted drizzling way, and he felt lonely and troubled and dispirited. It mattered little to him whither he went, so that he could but walk off this fit of unusual depression, and he found himself almost before he knew it

in the midst of all the light and bustle of Oxford Street. Turning thence into quieter ways, he wandered on until somebody fell against him with a shock, and drove his crape-bound hat over his eyes. He recovered himself, and saw a drunken Irishman, who offered fluent apologies. 'For barrin' him,' the man was saying, 'there's not a creature in the wurld that oi'd lay a little finger on except in the way o' good-fellowship. Will ye take a dhrink? Just to show there's no ill feelin'? Dew now!'

'No, thank you,' said Hastings, and walked on.

The man clung to him with repeated apologies and repeated hospitable offers. 'Well,' said the follower at last, 'I dar'n't go tew far away, lest oi should be missin' me friend. If ye won't, ye won't, me boy; an' so, good-noight te ye.'

'Good-night,' Hastings answered; and the man turned back and lurched down the street. The rain had ceased, and Hastings stood folding his umbrella in dreamy mood, with a sad little laugh at the man's persistent attempt to drink with him, Suddenly, not fifty yards away, there rose a terrific hubbub, and wild

cries for help. Towards Hastings, like a dart, ran a stout little figure with guttural yells of 'Murder!' Behind him, gaining at every stride, came the man who had said 'Good-night' only a minute or two before. What the meaning of the pursuit might be Hastings had no power to divine. It seemed probable that it was a piece of drunken sport on the part of both men, for it was impossible that they should have had time to quarrel since the Irishman had left him. But the cruel blow which felled the fugitive was real enough, and so was the murderous knife that gleamed above his prostrate figure. Hastings was just in time to bring his umbrella down full swing upon the Irishman's wrist. The knife fell upon the pavement, and the umbrella-stick went to shivers. The man was up in a second, and rushed at Hastings like a bull. It was all uneven. Not half-a-dozen years of foolish living in London and Paris had robbed the prettiest boxer of his day at Cambridge of his style. The tale is as old as the hills. Hastings could not hurt the man severely even had he wished. But on the other hand, the man could not get near him, and his savage rushes were exhausting him and knocking him

about a good deal. A gentleman came out of the house in front of which this little drama was enacting.

'Pray, oblige me by picking up this poor fellow,' said Hastings quietly, opposing the frantic Irishman with wary foot and hand and eye. 'I found this man trying to murder him. There's a knife somewhere.'

At the mention of the knife, the Irishman made a rush for the prostrate figure. Hastings dropped in front of him like lightning, and the man went flying over the stooping figure, came down heavily upon the pavement, and lay still. The whole thing had not lasted two minutes.

'Very neat indeed,' said the gentleman on the door-step; and at that moment a constable came with placid mien round the corner.

'Hillo!' said the official; 'move on here—I beg pardon, sir. What's the matter?' Before the constable had well made this inquiry, the gentleman had left the door-step, and was bending over the figure of the portly little man who had been first to fall in this affray.

'Ha!' he said; 'this is my friend the money-lender, is it?—Help me to carry this man into the hall, policeman.' The policeman

lent a pair of hands, and the figure of the portly little man was carried indoors. 'Now for the other.' At that moment of time an elderly fat man came round the corner, and stood still to watch the proceedings. There was blood upon the whitened door-step of the house into which the one man had been carried, and the two gentlemen and the policeman were stooping to raise the Irishman, who lay like one dead doubled against the area railings. The thing wore altogether a melodramatic aspect, and any elderly fat man passing at the time would have been phlegmatic indeed had he not paused to look. The fat man hovered round the three as they bore the insensible figure into the hall, and breathed stertorously in his eager interest. He followed to the door, and there fell into an attitude expressive of profound amazement. Nobody had noticed him, and it is not probable indeed that anybody so far had even seen him. There was a general start when he cried out aloud, 'Why, bless my heart alive, if that ain't my man, Tasker!'

'You know him?' said the gentleman of the house, looking up for a second, and then busying himself about the insensible head again.

'Look here, policeman,' said Benjamin Hartley. 'You go for a doctor.

The policeman smiled, and whispered, 'This is Dr. Brand, one of the most heminent surgeons of the day.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Hartley, 'that's fort'nate.' Then he looked at Hastings. '*You* seem to ha' been in this here shindy, young gentleman.'

'For once,' responded he, shaken back into his old ways by the incident; 'fact and appearance travel together. I *have* been in this here shindy.'

'What's it all about?' asked Mr. Hartley, regarding his new acquaintance with some surprise.

'I am really unable to say,' said Hastings calmly. 'The big man ran after the little one, knocked him down, and drew a knife.—By the way'—turning to the officer—'you will find a knife and a hat outside. Will you oblige me?—The policeman turned away to the door—'And an umbrella,' added Hastings.

'Was it you,' asked Mr. Hartley, 'as doubled up that cove like that? Again the railings?'

'I had to do it, you know,' said Hastings; and Benjamin Hartley stared at him, and wondered. He measured with his eye the figure

of the prostrate Irishman, and then looked back at Hastings, with flaxen moustache and flaxen hair and girlishly delicate complexion. A deep-drawn breath and a slow exclamation 'Ah!' bore testimony to his amazement.

Dr. Brand hearing this brief colloquy, chuckled within himself. Rising to his feet he said, 'This man is rather severely hurt. He ought to be removed to the hospital.' A slight examination of the second figure resulted in a similar verdict. 'I know the man, too,' said the doctor. 'His name is Closky, and he lives in Bolter's Rents, in Oxford Street.' This was addressed to the officer, who had found the knife, and was now offering to Mr. Hastings his battered properties.

'There is no danger, I hope,' said Hastings.

'It will not be possible to say anything about that in either case for a day or two,' the doctor answered.

The policeman was despatched for stretchers and bearers, and the two disabled men were soon deposited at the hospital. The doctor promised to call there in the morning; and he and Hastings and old Hartley solemnly exchanged cards. Then the old man went off with Hastings to the hospital to see that Tasker

was well bestowed. The two took a cab, and so arrived some time before the wounded. Whilst they waited, the house-surgeon—who knew of Mr. Hartley of Hartley Hall, and had heard of him from afar as a sort of Gentile Rothschild—was overwhelmingly polite, and the old gentleman was full of enthusiasms for Hastings' pluck and prowess. It reminded him—so he said with fatherly pride—of his son the Lieutenant when he was at Cambridge. 'Was that Hartley of Jesus?' asked Hastings. 'It was, sir,' the old man answered, beaming. Did Hastings know the Lieutenant?—Hastings had that distinguished pleasure.

The old man referring to his card again, cried out, 'Why, sir, you an' me's neighbours, if I ain't mistaken.'—Hastings assented. —'I shall be proud to see you, sir, at 'Artley 'All. My son the Lieutenant 'll be at home at Christmas-time; and my son Orris Sinjin, of Jesus, Cambridge, also. May we look to see you there? No fuss; no show, sir; but a very hearty welcome, I am sure.'

Hastings would be delighted. He liked the old man's bluff hearty ways, and his low-comedy gentility, and his innocent bounce and brag.

'Three generations, you know, sir,' said the old gentleman with hearty candour. 'That's the rule, sir. My young fellers don't make a bad show for the second. Two as fine young chaps as you'd wish to look at.' This to the house-surgeon, who nodded with some embarrassment.

The wounded men came in at this juncture, and the house-surgeon gave them the benefit of his skill without delay. He called Mr. Hartley's attention to the fact that Tasker's jewellery seemed valuable. 'Yes,' said the old gentleman in answer; but he was in the habit of carrying about papers which were still more valuable, and it would be as well to make sure that they were taken due care of. Saying this, he took hold of Tasker's coat and emptied the pockets. Amongst other things appeared a very fat pocket-book, the clasp of which was insecure. The book opened in the old man's hand, and a number of papers fell upon the floor. Hastings stooped and picked up some of them, one of which he crumpled in his hand, unseen, and held there.

'Hillo!' cried Mr. Hartley, 'here's that cheque of mine, that he ought to ha' paid over a week ago.—I can't take this away with

me; can I.?' he asked the policeman, who stood beside him.

The official said that was impossible; and the old man, in a state of considerable excitement and anger, called for pen and ink, and producing a cheque-book, filled up a cheque in favour of Francis' Fairholt, Esquire, for for four hundred guineas. Hastings smoothed out the piece of crumpled paper he had held in his hand until now, and laid it before Mr. Hartley. It was a bill for ninety-eight pounds ten shillings, two days overdue, payable at Lorder and Hobbes' Bank, Lombard Street, and drawn on Francis Fairholt by Aminadab Tasker.

'Hillo!' cried Mr. Hartley again, 'this is a damn fine game, this is!—Why, Mr. Tasker,' he muttered in a lower voice, 'you've been a-detaining of my cheque for something, have you! Very well, sir—very well. When you come round again, I'll have a little deal along of you, as you'll remember.'

'I knew of this, Mr. Hartley,' said Hastings in a low tone, laying his finger on the bill, 'and I knew that Tasker held your cheque for Fairholt. Frank is my best friend, sir; and I went round to-night to tell him that he

need not be troubled about this.' He laid his finger again upon the bill.

'Thank you, sir,' said the old man. 'I know that scoundrel, sir. I've told him long ago as if he had any more dealings with Mr. Fairholt I'd break him. I'll go away at once to the poor lad's place and pay him this 'ere cheque. There's three days' grace allowed on this dockyment,' said Mr. Hartley, 'as perhaps you know, Mr. Hastings, and there's no danger till to morrow.'

'May I come with you to Fairholt's place?' asked Hastings.

Hartley gave a ready assent, and they drove away together. The old gentleman swore as terribly as our army did in Flanders, and poured forth threats against the unconscious Tasker. He blamed himself for employing Tasker at all, but excused himself on the ground that 'there's allays a deal o' dirty work to do in business.' 'I shouldn't wonder,' he shouted, as the cab jolted over the stone pavements, 'if that feller as dropped on to him to-night wasn't somebody as he'd ruined.' Hastings shouted in return that this was very likely true; and Hartley lay back and muttered new threats and anathemas. They

reached in due time the house in which Frank lived, and learned that he had not yet returned. Mr. Hartley asked for an envelope, and enclosed the cheque with one line—'In payment for picture.—B. H.' Then he turned into the street, still very angry. 'I know what lads are like, sir,' he said. 'I've got two young chaps o' my own, an' one of 'em suffered dreadful through this kind o' thing. And here's a 'igh-minded, sensitive young feller very likely a-breaking his heart through this scoundrel. Well, well, it'll be a warnin' to him maybe. All's well as ends well. He'll be all right to-morrow.—Shall I set you down anywhere, Mr. Hastings?'

The two found that their ways were apart, and so bade each other good-night.

'I like that odd old fellow,' said Hastings to himself. 'He's new enough; but the new heraldry is hands *and* hearts. I shall look him up some day.' Then he fell to thinking of Frank, and made up an honest mind to give his old friend some good advice and monetary help if need were, though that seemed unlikely. Frank was about to marry old Hartley's niece, and Hastings, like the rest of the world, knew that the builder and

owner of Hartley Hall had a colossal fortune.

Mr. Hartley also was preparing good advice for Frank, and was ready to offer monetary aid if need were. 'I must come down heavy on him,' the old man thought as he lay back in his cab, 'and frighten him out o' these wicked ways.' There was no sin like carelessness in money matters, in Benjamin Hartley's eyes. Even dishonesty would have been little more reprobated by this good old heathen of a millionaire, for that did but show a perversion of the most estimable of human instincts—the desire to be rich.

Whilst these two friends of his were pondering that good advice and planning that monetary aid which were never to be given, Frank was standing in the night alone at the edge of Hampstead Heath. The wind moaned and the rain fell drearily. A rebellious rage against his evil fortune, a passion of regret for bygone follies, an unspeakable terror of the morrow, and through all these, such real dread of the grief which was coming upon those who loved him—rage, remorse, fear, and love —these four—did battle within his soul. And

the wide heath, with the rain and the wind and the night upon it, lay before him like a threat of his own future, storm-tormented, untouched by any ray of light from earth or heaven.

CHAPTER IV.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

I rolled this trophy up carefully.

IT was about the time of my installation at Hartley Hall, that I began to be conscious of a feeling which I have since regarded with some amusement. I began to feel most marvellously old. My experiences of the world seemed to have been so varied that to my own mind I was another Gil Blas or Roderick Random. And I quite seriously believe now that a certain instability, a certain taste for wandering and love of change which mark me as a man, had their natural growth in the kaleidoscopic changes of my early life. When I was in bed and alone, I used to repeat to myself a line of a favourite hymn of Sally's, with a sense of the uncertainty of things in general, which

but few children of my age could have arrived at, born of those changeful experiences—'I've no abiding city here.' To my novel-reading childhood it seemed natural that aunts and uncles should turn up in a random sort of way, and bring abrupt changes into life; and I was so used to the marvellous, that if Uncle Ben had turned into a magician who traded new lamps for old ones, and had carried his own hall and park into Central Africa, I should have been inclined to accept it as a fulfilment of the prophecies of my little library. I find that usage has betrayed me. 'Uncle Ben.' Mr. Hartley was not Mr. Hartley long. I had not been a week in that rawly-splendid mansion before the red-faced, bald-headed old gentleman was my closest chum, and had assumed by his own desire that title. He loaded me with silver money, and bought a pony for my use; and though I had no occasion to spend a penny, and no opportunity, it seemed to afford him the greatest pleasure to chink four or five new half-crowns together, and approaching me with a look of sly jollity, to slip them into my pockets one by one, with many pretences of doing it, between, as though the whole performance were an elaborate conjur-

ing trick. I had grown so rapidly during my fever, that I used sometimes to stand up and look at my own toes with a sense of distance from them such as no mature person twice my height ever experienced. But in spite of this, the pony's rotund girth was something too much for my small legs, and for a long time I sat him with a precarious balance and a sense of insecurity. Uncle Ben used generally to walk beside me, and not infrequently Maud would take the bridle on the other hand, and so we three would ramble slowly through the park together, one of us in a state of nervous transport, and unwitting of the troubles of those who walked beside him. One day when the grass was crisp with the first frost of winter, and the brown leaves dropped from the trees without a breath of air to shake them, as though they released themselves of their own will, Uncle Ben and I went out together. Maud was about to join us, but he waved her back, and following her, said something, in answer to which she nodded sadly.

When he had led me some distance through the park, my companion looked up at me and said, 'Johnny, my lad, Sally's a-going

down home to see her mother. Should you like to go with her?'

'Yes, indeed I should,' I answered; and hoped that nothing was wrong in Sally's affairs.

'No, Johnny,' said Uncle Ben; 'theer's nothin' wrong. While you're theer, Johnny, if Sally asks you to show her—' There he stopped in his speech and his walk, and arrested the pony. He looked thoughtfully at me, and then laughing at my puzzled face, touched me on the cheek, and said, 'Never mind that now. When Sally asks you anythin', why then it'll be time enough to answer —won't it?'

I said I supposed it would; and he turned the pony's head round, though we had not been out a quarter of the common time, led me back to the front of the house, lifted me down without a word, and left me standing at the door. I had not been there long, when Hawker—the Splendour in the canary-coloured plush and sky-blue coat, whom I had seen on my first visit, and had since grown familiar with—came to me and informed me that I was wanted in the morning-room. Thither I went, and found Maud, who told me that

Sally was going to start in an hour from then, and that she was expected to return, bringing me with her in two or three days' time at farthest. Somehow, there was a reservation in her manner — children are quick to read such things—as if she desired to say something and yet would not say it. I had seen something of the same sort in Uncle Ben. When Sally came, there was an air of mystery about her of an almost melodramatic cast, and she palpably dissembled, like one behind the footlights. She wore so absurd a pretence of being in her usual humour, that I was quite alarmed at it. Whilst the groom drove us to the railway station, I revolved the problem in my mind, and was persuaded before we got to the train that some new change of life was in store for me. I did not believe that Uncle Ben had tired of protecting me, for he had worn his most genial and affectionate look at parting, and had studded me all over with new half-crowns, setting me on my back on the sofa in order to do it, and laughing at me merrily the while. I was sure of Maud also; and as for Sally, I was as convinced then as I am now that that good creature would be a consenting party to

nothing which would harm me; and yet I felt persuaded that something new was about to befall me by the consent of all of them, and was in a nervous tremor to know what the something could be. I asked no questions, and Sally went on with her pretence of there being nothing the matter, with as much success as any bandit who ever ostentatiously concealed himself upon the boards.

The great manufacturing town lifted its chimneys into the pall of smoke which they themselves created, and its streets had the old roll and clamour and bustle. Sally took me into a great confectioner's shop there, and gave me cakes and tea, and was very deferential to the waitress who attended us. I was a little awed also, remembering distinctly the petticoated figure who stood so strangely for me in memory, and who had first seen the place, and thought what a palace it was a year ago. I was very smartly dressed now, and booted and gloved in the nattiest way, so that I rather pitied that little figure. But I could not dissociate him from myself, and felt that I laboured under his special disabilities. The mistress of the establishment, a motherly-looking old lady who rustled

her black silks with an air of great importance, came over and asked Sally whose little boy that was. Sally responded respectfully. It was the only son of Mr. John Campbell of the Baker's Green Ironworks. The old lady looked gently towards me, and said in a whisper that in that case I was an orphan.

'Yes,' said Sally.

'Who is he living with?' the old lady asked again.

'He's livin' along of his uncle, ma'am,' Sally answered, 'at Hartley Hall.'

'Mr. Benjamin Hartley?' said the old lady —'the great millionaire?'

Sally answered in the affirmative.

The old lady, after taking a long look at me over Sally's head, went away again; and I heard her whisper to one of the waitresses behind the long marble counter that I was the nephew of Mr. Hartley of Hartley Park, the great millionaire; and this whisper going round to all the marble-topped tables, I became conscious that I was being made a show of, so that I blundered with my tea, and had no idea as to what I ought to do with my eyes and hands.

Sally was also a little discomfited by this

general inspection ; and when at last we rose to go, and I produced a big-clasped Russia-leather purse, which Uncle Ben had given me that morning to hold the new half-crowns in, the general public of the place was painfully interested in this glimpse of a portion of the great millionaire's money, and I was very glad to escape with Sally to the street.

The dusk had fallen when we got to the railway station again in time to meet the train which bore us to my native place. There was only one old gentleman in the second-class carriage in which we rode, and he was looking out of the window. I suppose that I spoke louder than I had intended, for when I asked Sally what a millionaire was, he looked round.

Sally not being specially ready at dictionary definitions, responded, 'Why, your uncle's a millionaire, my darling.'

The old gentleman turned round so sharply again that he knocked his hat off.

'Is that young Master—er—er—Master—'

He snapped his fingers impatiently, as if he had forgotten a familiar name.

'Master Campbell, sir,' said Sally, helping him out.

'To be sure,' said the old gentleman, — 'Master Campbell. He's the nephew of—er —er, dear me!—he's the nephew of—er—'

The old gentleman snapped his fingers again, as if he had forgotten a familiar name.

'Mr. Hartley, sir, of Hartley Hall,' said Sally, helping him out again.

'Of course,' said the old gentleman. 'Bless my soul! yes, of course. Dear me!'

He put on a pair of glasses to look at me, and again I felt disconcerted, and had trouble with my roving eyes and hands. We got out at the same station, and the old gentleman seized an official in a gold-bound hat upon the platform, and pointed me out to him triumphantly as though I were a marvellous curio. 'That's the nephew of the great millionaire, Hartley of Hartley Park, you know.'

The official person came forward, and stooped down at the door which led from the platform, and stared at me under pretence of asking me for my ticket, and I felt that I was an impostor, and was making some pretensions—I did not know how—to something that did not belong to me.

Outside the station Sally commanded a fly, and we drove away through the familiar streets

in which the same dull gas-lamps gleamed, and the same people went to and fro as of old. They were all the same, streets and people and shops, except that a tinman had opened a new establishment with plate-glass windows, in which the bright tin-ware glistened like silver. This one alteration made the whole place seem new and strange in the midst of all its familiarities. We were not long in reaching the rough and broken road in which the cottage stood. Looking from the windows of the fly, I could see the mounds of slag and cinder which lay solemnly, like real hills, behind it, when the driver halted and got down, and said he could drive no further, because there was what he called a 'crowning sin' in front of us. By this we both understood him to mean a crowning-in. The land had given way and had fallen into the hollow left by some disused coal-mine—had *crowned-in* the country people say—an occurrence by no means uncommon in the district. I had often gone to look at places where such landslips had occurred, creating great rugged gaps which looked like Alpine valleys to my childish eyes. The driver said he knew the way round, and for an extra fourpence undertook to pilot us and

carry the portmanteau. We went cautiously in the darkness, and the lowering sky looked *bare* to me where some old trees had stood when I knew the scene so well. When we came to the cottage, it was made evident that our arrival had been expected. Sally's mother had spread upon the table a clean white cloth, which I knew by old experience to be reserved for occasions of high ceremony; and crockery-ware for three was laid upon it. The wrinkled old woman, in her black stuff dress, her apron of blue check, and her white cap, ran up the steps from the kitchen, and hugged Sally and kissed her and cried over her.

'You'll ha' lots o' time for that sort o' game inside,' the driver suggested, deriding sentiment; 'gi' me my ha'pence, an' I'll toddle.'

Nobody taking immediate notice of the driver, he walked into the kitchen with the portmanteau, lit his pipe at the fire, and looked at us all three with an aspect of benevolent interest, until Sally remembered him, and paid him out of the Russia-leather purse, when he regarded his money with deep scorn, and took his way dejectedly. Old Mrs. Troman depressed me at first by courtesying to me, and treating me as a visitor of high impor-

tance; but her disposition to regard me in that light wore off by-and-by, and we fell into the old ways, sitting by the fire, she and Sally talking, and I keeping my own fancies in wandering company, or listening, as I chose.

It was still plain to me that Sally had something on her mind, which she strove to disguise; and when her mother said to her suddenly after a lapse of silence, 'An' now tell us what you come down for?' my faithful servitor's assumption of having had no special purpose was the greatest failure in the way of private theatricals which I can remember. Conscious of the defeat of her purpose, Sally roused herself, and bustled me off to bed with a great air of kindly authority. I lay in the old room and seemed to slip back into the old life again, though with a sense that it was all narrower and smaller than it had once seemed to be. It came back completely and without that reservation in my dreams, but the room looked very bare and small and poor in the morning, though I felt myself in some indistinct way ungrateful when I thought so. It was only grey daylight when I awoke, but I got out of bed and

dressed myself, and then looked out of the window, from which I could see the corner of the crowning-in. Naturally interested in that phenomenon, I ventured downstairs, and after a struggle, succeeded in opening the back-door, through which I gained the road, and in a minute came upon the edge of the landslip. It was far deeper and wider than is common in such cases. It often happens that the earth sinks so gradually, that what was a gentle hill becomes a gentle hollow without the visible breaking of one clod of earth; but in this instance the road and the field on each side of it had gone suddenly, carrying the hedges clean out of sight, and leaving the trees I had missed the night before head-downwards, with their roots sticking out forlornly from the broken soil like helpless arms. Here was an opportunity for exploration which no boy could have resisted. I clambered down into the hollow, growing rather clayey in the process; but evoking—in true child-fashion—more fancies from my descent than any grown poet could get out the descent of the Andes; and came by-and-by upon the roots of the first tree. This tree I knew again at once by the

peculiarity of its form. Even its present topsy-turvy attitude could not disguise it. The trunk, as I remembered, used to rise in two distinct columns which blended half-way up, and formed an inverted V as they leaned towards each other. As a mere baby, I had crawled under that V many a time, and found it an admirable hiding-place. I climbed up now, by the hanging roots, and looked down at the old seat. In one place the clustered roots were so thickly filled with earth that they made a sort of platform, and to this, with some little difficulty, I climbed. Whilst I stood looking about me from this point of vantage, the slender roots bent under my weight, and I slid slowly down, without in the least hurting myself, but also without power to help myself, until I had reached the cleft of the tree, where I laughed aloud to think what a slide I had had.

I found it not altogether easy to extricate myself, and in my final struggle caught my foot in something which threw me down, so that had I a harmless tumble out of the tree cleft into a little clayey hollow which lay on one side below it. Rising from this second slip much besmeared, but still laughing, I

found that I had brought something with me which entangled my feet. It turned out to be a shirt, very much besmeared, and to my amazement I discovered on turning it over that the front and wrists were decorated with studs and links exactly like those worn by Uncle Ben. I rolled this trophy up carefully, and without stopping to think of my besoiled aspect, went hotly up the broken hill-side over the road and towards the cottage. Sally was about by this time, and cried out 'Heaven a mercy!' when she saw me coming. When I showed her my treasure-trove, which I did at once before she had time to scold me, she threw it away with an exclamation. 'Mercy on us, child! Don't bring your old rags here, you dirty boy!' But I recovered the shirt with more resolution than I was commonly master of, and showed the studs, when Sally sat down on an upturned tub which happened to be near us in the yard, caught feebly at the pump handle, and cried, 'Bless us and save us!' Seeing that I had made an impression, I followed it up with the statement that I had found the shirt in an overturned tree on the landslip. She was

greatly agitated, and asked me if there had been anything else there. Nothing that I had seen, I said.

'Run away back, and see,' said Sally, taking me by the shoulder. 'Run away while you're dirty.'

She herself arose, and together we crossed the yard, and made for the place. I clambered down this time by an easier way than I had first taken, and Sally followed me. When we came to the tree, she said, in a quick excited way, 'I remember. A reg'lar cave to hide anythin' in. Let me lift you up, Johnny.' With that she took me in her arm, and lifted me towards the hollow. I caught at a root, and scrambled up easily, and by this time, quite as excited as my companion, looked about on every side. 'What's that you're treading on?' cried Sally from below. I looked down and saw a garment half revealed beneath a fall of loose earth. Extricating it with some little trouble, for the foothold was narrow, I threw it down, and came upon another, which I sent after it. There was nothing left, and I got out of the cleft again, Sally's arms receiving me. When we reached the cottage yard, she shook the clothes free of the rough

earth which clung to them, and laid them on the ground, and there gazed at them with an expression in which many emotions were blended.

At this moment Mrs. Troman came upon the scene, and testified to the greatest surprise to our appearance. 'Well—if—I—ever did!' said the old lady. 'Why, our Sarah, a body might think as yo'd gone crazy.'

Inviting her mother to accompany her, Sally gathered up the besoiled clothes, and went indoors and up-stairs. The old lady, after another ejaculation over me, followed her. A few minutes later, whilst I stood at the sink in the kitchen making myself elaborately muddy in the attempt to clean myself, and marvelling greatly at Sally's excitement, Mrs. Troman appeared again, and subjected me to the well-remembered ordeal by water, then laid out clean garments for me from the portmanteau, and sent me up-stairs. I was at first so filled with wonder, that there was no room within me for curiosity, or I might have made some inquiry as to the reason of Sally's emotion. When I had dressed and descended to the kitchen, I found that she had left the house. The old lady, who had re-

covered her familiarity, and her old sense of control, as I now believe, by the mere fact that she had had me once more under her hands at the pump, told me in answer to my inquiries that 'children should speak when they was spoke to;' and by that rebuff left me with no other employment than to look at and listen to the old monitory clock, which shook its palsied little finger at me sixty times a minute in quite the old fashion, and ticked reproof and loneliness. When the palsied little finger had travelled sixty times round the fatuous countenance in the middle of the clock face, Sally returned perturbed and pale, and we three sat down to breakfast together. Mrs. Troman had at one time held the post of cook in a gentleman's family; but on this occasion the eggs were pebbly in their hardness, the ham was uneatably smoked, and the coffee was in such a condition that it would have satisfied the gentleman in the old Joe Miller story, who, drinking it for the first time, mistook it for a new sort of porridge, and complained that his companion 'had all the thick.' I had felt the lash of Mrs. Troman's tongue many a time; but Sally until that morning had never addressed to me

one word of harshness. When in the course of the meal she fell with sudden spitefulness upon me and boxed my ears, without reasonable provocation, I retired from the table, and sat on the upturned tub in the yard in a condition of stony heartbreak, for which my memory could find no parallel. After a time she came out in tears, and kissed me, and protested she hadn't meant it; but that she was that worrited with one thing and another, that she declared she didn't know which way to turn. 'An' that I should have struck you, causeless, Johnny, my darlin,' it does go reg'lar to my 'art.' So she protested weeping. 'Be a man,' she urged with tears, 'and say it didn't hurt you, Johnny, dear.'

I became as manly as I could at so short notice, and declared that it had not hurt me, whereon Sally wept anew and said I was a heart of gold. Matters being thus satisfactorily settled, I was led indoors again; and Sally having wiped her eyes, put on her bonnet and shawl, washed my tear-soiled face and took me out of the cottage, leading me in the direction of the village, until we found the fly in which we had travelled the night before standing by the roadside. We both entered

that ramshackle vehicle, and the driver, without waiting for instructions, rattled away with much noise but at no great pace towards the railway station. The singular and untoward events at the breakfast table had disinclined me for wondering about anything, and I did not at all trouble myself as to where we were going. The fly stopped before the door of the *Ward Arms*—there was a *Ward Arms* or *Dudley Inn* in every parish of the Black Country in those days—and we alighted there. The waiter at the door walked in front of us without speaking, as though he knew our business, which was a great deal more than I did, and marching sedately up stairs, led us into a room in which my Cousin Will stood alone with the stained garments I had that morning discovered, spread on the table before him. He looked at me with the kindly smile which was common to him, though his eyes were troubled when I entered, and grew sad again a moment later. 'I want to ask you some questions,' he said gently, 'and I want you to be as careful as you can in answering me. Did you see a stranger who frightened you very much, nearly a year ago, down here?'

'Yes,' I said, beginning to wonder if I had been brought here on purpose to be asked.

'Can you remember on what day you saw him?'

It was the day, I answered, when Aunt Bertha first came to Mrs. Troman's house.

He referred there to a note-book, and nodded slowly to himself once or twice before he went on; 'How was he dressed?'

I saw his eyes turn to the garments on the table, and in a moment I knew them. 'He wore those things,' I cried, 'and a hat like the one that hung on the hat-stand at your house.'

'What did he wear when you saw him next?' he asked. His face was very pale, and there was a suggestion of a memory in it if I could only have grasped it—something I had seen in a dream in my illness—no—yes—the face of the man about whom he questioned me. 'What is the matter?' he said, with a kindly hand upon me.

'Nothing,' I answered; 'only—his face was like yours just then, and like—like Mr. Fairholt's the night he went to London.'

Sally and he exchanged looks.

'What did he wear when you saw him the second time?' he asked again.

'He was dressed like a common man,' I said, 'in thick clothes and heavy boots.'

'Were you with Aunt Bertha when you saw him that time?'

'Yes,' I answered; 'and he saw her, and shouted something, and then ran away.'

'So near,' he murmured to himself—'So near!' Then after a pause: 'You saw him once more, didn't you, Johnny? How was he dressed when he looked in at the window at home? Had he the same clothes as when you saw him here?'

That question I could not answer. I remembered nothing but the face.

'What made you remember the face?' he asked.

'It frightened me,' I said—'his eyes and teeth.'

He nodded sadly, as if to signify that he understood me, and sat down, resting his forehead on his hand. Sally absently smoothed the soiled garments lying on the table. After a pause he rose again and asked me if I could show him the exact places in which I had seen the stranger. When I answered in the affirmative, he bade me come with him, and left the room—Sally and I following.

We all got into the fly; and from my description of the clay-pit Sally told the driver where to go. We sat in silence as we lumbered along, and after a time Sally stopped the vehicle near a stile, beyond which lay the scene of the first adventure recorded in these pages. Cousin Will inquired carefully as to the direction from which the stranger came, but of that I could tell nothing. Then he inquired with equal closeness as to what main or by-roads could have brought him here, and there Sally's local knowledge came into play, and she told him all she knew.

He paced up and down the walk for a time, and then came back and addressed us. 'It is a poor clue,' he said, 'but it is something. I don't think I shall want you again, Troman.—Good-bye, Johnny. I shall see you soon, at home.' He waved his hand and walked away slowly down the path. Sally looked wistfully after him, and in a little while turned away, taking my hand in hers.

We went back to Hartley Hall next day. Nobody questioned me there, or made any observation on my absence, except to welcome my return. And I was left with a new link in that strange romance which only

the years completed for me—a story leading nowhere, and therefore everywhere—a tragic story, to which, before I could read it truly, I gave many wild beginnings and conclusions.

CHAPTER V.

HISTORY.

'It's ninety-eight pound ten,' said the rueful man.

HERE let the Muse who guides this chronicle introduce to the reader the host of the *Spotted Dog* in Bloomsbury. Mr. James Groves had by nature no more right to a place in a romance or a tragedy than the Derby Dog to gambol in the Elysian Fields. He was a pale and pimpled young man, of weedy growth, and his hair and eyebrows were of a faint primrose colour. He was great in the matter of pins, and scarfs, and fancy waistcoats. His father had been a pugilist, and had fulfilled the ordinary fate of gentlemen of his profession, who, being first over-trained, are afterwards not trained at all, and, settling down in a public-house to enjoy the *otium cum dignitate* of their lives, take to

drinking, and so sink to an unheroic close. With such an ancestry—it might be invidious to trace it further—Mr. James Groves might naturally be regarded as an authority on sporting matters. Many matches, of all sorts, and for amounts large and small, were made in his house, and the *Spotted Dog* was indeed the chief rendezvous of the sporting contingent in London. I have indicated that Mr. Groves was not by nature intended for a place in written romance or tragedy. But one man in his life plays many parts. The heavy villain of real life has little in common with his prototype of the lending-library and the theatre. Poor old King Lear lets you know, when you spend an hour with him, that the convulsions of a kingdom have brought about the hanging of the court fool along with other matters. Fate pitchforks people about in an inexplicable way, giving this foolish youngster a place in a tragedy, and that venerable philosopher a part in a farce.

It befell that on the morning of the day on which Frank Fairholt wandered in desperation on to Hampstead Heath, and stood there lonely and half-mad in the rain, Mr. James Groves arose and adorned himself with much

jewellery; and drove in a high dog-cart, in the society of two congenial spirits, to the *Spaniard's Inn*, a hostel known to fame, and celebrated in the fiction of that chaste and elegant author, the late Lord Lytton. Here the trio bestowed the high-stepping steed and the dog-cart, and, after refreshing themselves with certain liquids, they took their unostentatious way to the house of a gentleman in the neighbourhood. This gentleman lived for no other end than 'sport,' and was one of those peculiarly constituted people who find their keenest pleasure in witnessing the combats of the lower animals. That is the formula. But for fear of misconstruction, I should have preferred to say the higher animals. The egotisms of humanity shall, however, be respected; and although I have my own opinion as to the relative values of this gentleman's life and those of the rats, dogs, and birds he induced to slay each other, there is no need to impress it on my reader.

There may have been perhaps a score of sporting gentlemen around the cockpit when our trio arrived at it. The brutal restrictions of British law even in those days were extended to the manly sport of cock-fighting, and con-

siderable care was taken by the gentleman at whose house the present 'main' was held, to shroud their pleasure in the profoundest secrecy. No interruption befell the refined enjoyment of the day. Mr. James Groves, an admitted authority upon the matter in hand, found many people who were rash enough to bet with him, and having netted a considerable sum of money, was in unusually high feather. When the main was over, and the greater part of the witnesses had quietly dispersed, Mr. Groves and his friends stayed and had luncheon with their host. In the course of the luncheon, Mr. Groves launched out in enthusiastic praises of the high dog-cart—which was a new product of the art of Long Acre—and of the high-stepping mare, which had been purchased by the lamented Groves senior, a notable judge of horse-flesh, and was famed for having repeatedly trotted a mile in some quite incredibly small number of seconds. These things to hear did the host of Groves Junior seriously incline, and being blessed with the two things which Groves Junior most admired in others —money and credulity, namely—burned to possess the marvel of a dog-cart and the high-stepping mare of fabulous achievement.

This flame of desire being artfully fanned by Mr. Groves's friends, and Mr. Groves himself declaring with much emphasis that he would sooner be boiled alive than part with either of those his properties, the host determined upon an ocular inspection of them, and despatched his own groom to the inn, with orders to bring the matchless mare and unprecedented dog-cart round. This done, he inspected them both with the aspect of a profound connoisseur, and, by way of establishing his own cunning in the matter of horse-flesh and dog-carts, admired the pair so highly that Mr. Groves was at length compelled, with many sounding asseverations of his sorrow, to part with them at something like twice their highest value. A formal receipt was drawn up and signed, a cheque handed over, and the transfer was complete.

'And now,' said Mr. Groves, 'how am I a-goin' to get 'ome, my pippings?'

This query accorded well with the host's simple ideas of humour, and he laughed loud and long. Mr. Groves, with great geniality joined in the laughter, but his friends, who had not especially profited by this transaction, 'relucted,' as the Great Essayist puts it, at the idea of walking home.

'I can put two of you fellers up here,' said the master of the house, 'but I can't find room for all three of you.'

Mr. Groves had an important engagement at a most absurdly early hour in the morning, and must go home that night. Would the host let his groom drive him over?—'No, he wouldn't,' said the host, and added humorously, 'Let him walk. It would do his legs good.'

'I'll tell you what we'll do, Grovey,' said one of Mr. Groves's friends. 'Bobby and me'll stop here to-night; but we'll walk with you as far as the top of the Spaniard's Lane, and there you're bound to be able to get an 'ackney coach, you know.'

This programme was accepted; and in the lowering dusk the three set off together. They had not gone far when the rain began to pelt down sharply, and they took refuge at the inn. The rain rather increasing than failing in force, after the space of an hour passed in the consumption of alcoholic liquors, Mr. Groves announced himself as 'gettin' a leetle peckish,' and proposed a steak with onions. His co[illegible] who were pretty generally willin[illegible] drink at any man's

expense, fell in readily with his views, and another hour went by. By this time none of the three felt at all inclined to move.

'You landed a bit on the main, didn't you, Bobby?' asked Mr. Groves from his side the fireplace.

'Five flimsies,' his friend responded sententiously.

'What did *you* fetch out of the pit?' asked Mr. Groves of his other companion.

'Oh,' said he, carelessly, stirring his grog as he spoke, and sipping it, 'I won about twelve pound.'

'I don't quite know what I won,' said Mr. Groves; 'I'll see.' And suiting the action to the word, he drew his chair up to the table, and produced a little chamois-leather bag containing gold and notes, and throwing this on the table, where it fell with a pleasant muffled jingle, he began to count its contents.

Whilst the gambling, horse-chanting, cock-fighting trio sat over whisky-and-water at the hospitable fireside of *The Spaniards*, one solitary and melancholy figure plashed about the roads of the heath in the darkness and the

rain. For poor Frank, the pillars of the world were shaken, and chaos had come again because of the want of a trifle less than a hundred pounds. Emotions in a nature like his are very changeable, and he had now come to a blind, angry rage at Fate, who had thus cruelly waylaid him. How bitter and how hard it was, you may partly guess. His penitence had been sincere, his reform earnest, his struggle with the worse half of himself severe and constant. He had striven honestly after virtue, had banished his besetting sin of idleness, and had crowned himself publicly with hard-earned laurels; and here and now, in the very flush of his triumph and the confidence of his hope, his dead vice and folly came to life again, and laid their hands thus heavily upon him. He saw father and brother and lover broken-hearted; his delicate vanity heard already how the town rang with his disgrace. Then he could bear the thought of these things no longer; he fell into a dull desperation, and in that mood tramped on through mud and rain until he came upon a gleam of light, and seeing that he stood before an inn, bethought him suddenly of how tired and wet he was, and so entered.

He called for a glass of hot brandy-and-water, and threw his wet coat and dripping wide-awake over a chair by the fire.

'Will you walk in here, sir?' said the landlord, throwing open a door.

Frank accepted the invitation; and entering the room, saw three men standing at a table, two of them laughing, and one somewhat ruefully regarding a small pile of gold and two or three notes which lay before him.

'Well, *now*, how much is it, Jemmy?' asked one of them,

'Why, it's ninety-eight pound ten,' said the rueful man, with an exclamation which need not be chronicled.

Ninety-eight pounds ten? Those words had been ringing in Frank's ears all day. After his exposure to the rain, and his long tramp in the darkness, he felt a little dazed and dream-like on his sudden entry to the warmth and light of the room. The sough of the wind, and the plash of the rain, and the noise of his own monotonous footsteps were yet in his ears. He was scarcely certain that his fancy had not played some trick upon him in the repetition of this haunting

phrase. But he had barely seated himself when the man repeated it ruefully. 'I'd have bet twenty to one,' he said, 'that there was a hundred pound there.'

'Well,' said one of his companions, 'you *did* bet two to one as there was a hundred pound there. Hand over a couple of sovs. Thankee.'

'Hand over,' said the third man, laughingly.

The loser paid both claimants from his purse. 'I'll carry this here ninety-eight pound ten home as I got it, anyway,' he said, and raked the money towards him, and bestowed it in his chamois-leather bag. 'Oh, you fellers can grin as much as you like; but I've done a pretty good day's work, takin' it altogether. I've made pretty near a couple o' hundred out o' that little bargain, my boys, and I pulled ninety-eight pound ten out of the cock-fight—'

'Sh!' said another, looking across at Frank.

Mr. Groves was somewhat inflamed by liquor, and chose to be very loud and lordly over this interruption. 'Look here, Mr. "Sh!"' said he, with semi-drunken impor-

tance, mimicking his companion. 'I'm taking it for granted as I'm a-talkin' among gentlemen; an' if any gentleman over'ears me a-remarkin' as I've won ninety-eight ten to-day on a cock-fight, why, so he may, and welcome. I don't suppose as anybody here is a-going to lay a criminal information; but if anybody is, why, my name's Jimmy Groves, and I'm the landlord o' the *Spotted Dog* in Bloomsbury, and what I say I stick to.'

'Oh, all right!' said the other, shrugging his shoulders deprecatingly. 'Say what you like.'

'Well,' said Mr. Groves, elaborately desirous to justify himself, 'I'll leave it *with* the gentleman. If a man's won ninety-eight ten on a cock-fight, and he says so, fair an' square an' plain, without palaver, mind you, what's the odds? I didn't say wheer the cock-fight was—did I, stupid? I leave it to the gentleman—Did I say wheer the cock-fight was, sir?'

Thus accosted, poor Frank responded that the gentleman seemed to him to have spoken most discreetly, and to be admirably worthy of his high good-fortune. This speech, which fed the bitterness of his own heart, put Mr.

Groves into a great state of good-humour, and he refought the great encounter of the morning, whilst Frank sickened at him. Whilst he sat there and heard this drunken cad relate his brutal story, the young man thought how wild was the fashion in which Fortune distributed her gifts. Frank looked at this pimpled and bejewelled young publican, and felt very bitterly towards him. 'This howling drunkard,' he thought, as he looked at him, 'has made to-day, by his presence at that degrading spectacle, the very sum of money the want of which will be my ruin at noon to-morrow. One can hardly believe in Providence in the face of it.' Frank became half-frightened at his own thoughts, so dark they grew. He called for more brandy, and drank it; and then passed into the outer room, put on his overcoat and hat, and went out into the darkness and the rain again. He tramped along slowly, so wretchedly absorbed that he scarce knew where he went. He filled and lit his pipe mechanically, and coming to a gate, threw his elbows on it, and lounged there unconscious of the night, or not caring for it, and smoked as he looked across the gloomy fields.

As he leaned there, he heard loud voices coming up the lane, startling the dreary night with tuneless song. *We won't go Home till Morning* refused to blend with *Auld Lang Syne* and *The Bay of Biscay.* Frank, half-hoping that they would go by in company, and save him from the demon who tempted him, drew nearer to the hedge at the side of the gate, and stood still there. The voices and the footsteps ceased awhile, and then he could hear the murmurs of conversation. Then two voices went away, and one came nearer, unmusically roaring 'For he's a jolly good fellow.' As the owner of the lonely voice came on and reeled past the gate, Frank knew him for the man who had been boasting of his winnings. 'That blackguard,' thought Frank, 'has in his pocket the very money which would save my whole life. Would it be theft to take it from him, and send it back when my cheque comes? I know who he is, and where he lives. It would save me, and do him no harm.' Thus the demon tempted him. 'Bah!' said Frank, 'I haven't the pluck for it. I can do any amount of filibustering in fancy, but I let the chance go by.' Up to that second of time he had only feared that he might be tempted, and

had speculated on what he would do if he were. Now, as if some irresistible hand impelled him, he dashed on at full speed after the stumbling drunkard in front, and coming up with him in half-a-minute, laid a hand upon him. The man, supposing it to be one of his late companions, hiccuped 'Hillo!'

'Listen to me!' said Frank.

'And who are you?' asked the other, with an oath, reeling from beneath Frank's grasp, and throwing himself into an attitude for defence.

'I am a desperate man,' said Frank. 'You have money about you that I want. I don't mean to rob you. I know who you are, and where you live, and I will send the money back again to you, but I *will* have it now. Give me the bag with ninety-eight pounds ten in it.'

'Stand off,' said the landlord of the *Spotted Dog*, 'or I'll blow your brains out! D'ye think I travel down a lane like this without pistols?'

He made a pretence of feeling in his breast-pocket, and in that instant Frank sprang upon him and brought him to the ground. He lay dead-still, and, with a frantic haste and horror

such as no words can tell, the abandoned madman searched for the bag, and found it, and dashed away. He leaped the hedge, and ran in a blind and maddening terror across the field. It was not the dread of anything that might pursue that urged him onward. His fear dwelt within. His abhorrence of the deed before it was fairly done was a thing that language cannot deal with. There is no such Tophet elsewhere as any man may create within the depths of his own soul. He was bound for ever beyond hope of release to that vile footpad who had just struck down the helpless man in the road behind, and he shuddered at that hideous companionship, and shrank from it with inexpressible loathing. Such a hopeless gulf arose between his present self and that happy misery of five minutes since, that as he ran he sobbed and wailed to think of it. He had not been running for twenty seconds when, with an access of remorse and terror, he stopped, and turned, and hurled the bag away from him with all his strength. Then he ran once more like a madman until breath and strength failed him together, and he fell to the ground.

When he came to himself, the rain had

ceased, and a watery moon was shining. He arose weakly, and knew the place in which he found himself. Like a man in a dream, he walked homeward, dragging one weary foot after the other. He was three miles from the scene of his crime, when a coach came rumbling by, and he hailed it, and ordered the coachman to drive him to the square nearest to his rooms. When he reached them, he found the house in darkness, except for his own sitting-room, in which a lamp was burning. He entered, and was surprised to find nothing changed. A whole unfathomable gulf of time lay between him and the hour at which he had left the place. He looked on his table for letters, as a phantom returning to the place known in the flesh might do things once familiar. He opened them, and regarded their contents with an almost added misery. All had been well if he had but suffered that little trouble patiently. It seemed quite a puny trouble now in comparison with this awful companionship with himself, which must be endured for ever. The decanter of brandy from which he had poured a gl[illegible]efore going out was still [illegible] the tal[illegible]eized a tumbler, and [illegible] Then

he took the lamp into his bedroom, undressed, and got into bed. The brandy and his fatigue sent him to sleep, and he lay in heavy forgetfulness until the sun was high.

He awoke with a sense of rest and ease, and stretched his arms luxuriously. But the terror which waited for his awaking dropped down upon him as swift as light, and oppressed his soul with anguish. With a strange automatic exactness, he went through the usual routine of his toilet, bathed and dressed, and wound his watch, and then rang for breakfast, and even ate a little. Next he called for a cab, and drove to the bank with Benjamin Hartley's cheque. He opened an account there, and drew one hundred and fifty pounds in notes, and a hundred pounds in gold. It was strange to himself how his thoughts seemed to float on the surface of that fiery sea of remorse which lay burning in him. He looked a little ill and tired, he thought, when he regarded himself in the glass. Could such misery look so unconcerned? he wondered. Could men carry such tragedies as his about the town and not declare them in their looks? What numberless horrors there might be in the world, unguessed of!

He drove to Tasker's Place in Acre Buildings, and found the office boy alone. The lad said his master had not yet come; and Frank waited there, and read the paper the boy gave him, and read understandingly and with interest, whilst that vast sea within lay burning him, and the knowledge of his sin and the eternal presence of his remorse were with him all the time. By-and-by a fellow-countryman of Tasker's came in excitedly, and told the story of the previous night, and stated that Tasker had recovered sufficiently from the first shock of the attack to send for him and to give him a power of attorney; and that he, the fellow-countryman, whose name was Schmidt, was ready to do any business in behalf of Mr. Tasker. He had already been to the police station and received the documents found upon his friend's person—amongst them Frank's bill for ninety-eight pounds ten shillings, which he now delivered. Frank paid over a hundred pounds in notes, received his change, put the bill in his pocket-book, drove home, and there burned that fatal paper. He sat awhile after this, and then bethinking him of certain jewels which he had of late been compelled to pawn, he sought out the

tickets, and walked to the pawnbroker's and redeemed them. When he had gone, for the first time, thither, he had walked shamefacedly up and down the street in the dusk; but now, memory left him no room for any smaller fear, and he went into the house unconcernedly and emerged with boldness, with the recovered rings already upon his fingers. He returned home, and again sat vacant for a while, and then rising, took a towel, and looking carefully over it to see that it was unmarked, he laid within it the hundred pounds in gold, and putting it into a cigar-box, sealed it carefully, using a half-crown as a seal. He wrapped the box neatly in brown paper, and putting the parcel into a small travelling-bag, laid it on one side awhile, and walked the streets, and met friends and acquaintances, and talked with them. Some of them remarked that he looked unwell, and he answered that he had been a little worried. So the day passed in idle routine, and the inward tragedy went on. All ambitions, all purities, all innocent pleasures and sweet hopes were dead—drowned in that inward sea of fire. A score of times when the common vacuities of the day failed him, the pain of remorse

came with so intense an agony upon him that he could have cried aloud.

He dined at the old Club. Food and wine were flavourless. He went home when the night had fallen, and took up the black travelling-bag, which bore nothing to indicate its owner, and walked by devious ways towards Bloomsbury. In a by-street in Soho he came upon a ticket-porter, who stood alone at the door of a little public-house with a pewter pot in his hand.

'Will you do an errand for me?' Frank asked.

'Yessir,' said the man, and bustled into the house with the pewter pot, and returned wiping his lips.

'Take that,' said Frank, 'to the *Spotted Dog* in Bloomsbury. Do you know it?'

'O yessir,' said the ticket-porter.

'Say the gentleman who borrowed it in Spaniard's Lane last night has sent it back again.'

'Any name, sir?'

'No. Yes. Thomson.'

Frank gave the man a shilling, and he shuffled off. Frank also, bearing his haunting pain with him, went away, and rambled list-

lessly about the streets. Finally, he went home wearily, and slept a horrible disturbed sleep, full of awful faces and night-fears unseen, and sudden gulfs that opened for him, and seas that drowned him, or floated some ghastly thing up to him slowly out of the depths. He arose in the morning, had his bath, and dressed, and rang for breakfast. The girl who waited upon him lingered a little.

'Do you want anything, Mary?' he asked.

'Why, no sir,' said the girl. 'But you're looking very ill yesterday and to-day, Mr. Fairholt; and if you'll forgive me for saying so, sir, I think you'd better see a doctor.'

Everybody had loved the young fellow, and his kindly generous jollity had enlisted Mary's sympathies these past two years. He dismissed her fears lightly; but she went away with a shake of the head, to indicate that she held her own opinion. Frank toyed languidly with his breakfast for a time, and then opened the paper. And there out of the printed page this struck him like a blow—

'Murder and Robbery in Spaniard's Lane.'

CHAPTER VI.

HISTORY.

'War's declared! Hurrah! Comè and join us.'

NEITHER Mr. Tasker nor his assailant gave prospect of early recovery. Tasker had received a terrible shaking; and Closky had been thrown with such force against the railings of Doctor Brand's house, that he incurred a severe concussion of the brain, and made no conscious movement for many days. With the wide benevolence of British charity, which falls like the rain of heaven upon the just and unjust, this man was nursed as carefully for penal servitude as if it had been intended to restore him to lifelong happiness and comfort. The emotions which agitated Mr. Tasker's bosom when he recovered his senses and found that Closky lay in the bed next to him, may in

some measure have retarded recovery; but be that as it may, five weeks elapsed before he was able to leave the hospital walls and go in pursuit of the friend and compatriot to whom he had entrusted his affairs. The friend and compatriot was not to be found. Mr. Tasker found his place of business in Acre Buildings closed; and the inquiries which he caused immediately to be set on foot resulted in a discovery. The compatriot had realised everything realisable, and had disappeared with the proceeds into space. Detective ingenuity revealed the fact that the land to which he had betaken himself was one with which England had no extradition treaty. Tasker's creditors were for the most part of his own people, and had compassion upon him; and he with a true Eastern love for jewellery, had got together in the days of his prosperity a large collection of gauds of value, the which he now disposed of as circumstances pressed him.

When Closky was so far recovered as to be able to endure with safety the first examination before a magistrate, he was taken from the hospital to the police court; and Hastings, Benjamin Hartley, and Dr. Brand

met Mr. Tasker there, and gave their evidence. The prisoner was formally committed for trial; and the business being over, Tasker essayed an appeal to his old employer. Mr. Hartley would have none of him, and bade him sternly, if he valued his own freedom, to speak to him no more. Tasker went away sadly and disposed of a jewel, and broken-heartedly away drank the proceeds. He was so crushed, that he made none but the feeblest efforts to recover his position; and he had, moreover, so little will to curb his old propensities to extravagance, that by the time the trial came on he was at the very edge of the gulf of poverty. The counsel for the prosecution alluded to Tasker's losses, which he deplored in feeling terms as the result of the ruffianly and unprovoked assault of the prisoner. Closky was found guilty, and sentenced to twelve years' transportation beyond the seas. Penkridge sat by Mrs. Closky in court whilst sentence was passed, and took the poor woman out and offered her whisky, which was by that time perhaps the only consolation he knew of.

The necessary attendances at the police court and at the assizes brought Hastings and Dr.

Brand together. Hastings took a fancy to the doctor, who returned the young man's liking cordially. Grief for the death of the dearest cannot last for ever, and Hastings was growing reconciled to loss; but he stood steadfast to his resolves, and accepted the responsibilities which his new position threw upon him. Mrs. Brand would fain have enlisted him in the cause of Bolter's Rents; but beyond money he could be persuaded to give nothing to that enterprise. The little lady accepted his donation with reluctance, and would have refused it outright, but for the thought of that great ocean of poverty on the shores of which she now walked so often. All this time the rumours of war were growing, and Benjamin Hartley made money as only millionaires make money when the fate of nations hangs in the balance. He was much in London negotiating on 'Change and in the arcana of Crœsus Brothers and others of that golden breed, for vast coups of financial policy.

One night Will Fairholt walked quietly into the chambers to which Hastings had recently removed in King's Bench Walk, Temple, and where, to keep himself out of harm's way, he was assiduously reading for the bar. Hastings

sprang eagerly to salute him. 'What brings you to town? Have you any news?'

'None,' said Will, shaking his head. 'I am here on business. The poor old governor is quite broken, and can attend to nothing.' His voice quivered as he spoke, and he looked pale and wretched.

'Will, old friend,' said Hastings gently, 'you are wearing yourself out. It ought to lie more heavily on me than you; for though, heaven knows, I would do anything now to undo what I did, I know I helped to this miserable end, and that all your strength went to prevent it.'

'You meant no wrong,' said Will, 'nor I; but I'm afraid we all did wrong together. There is nothing to do but to wait now, and no hope that waiting will do anything for us.'

'The scoundrel who ruined him has met with his deserts,' said Hastings; 'and there's some comfort any way.'

'Little comfort,' said Will, shaking his head. —'Hastings,' he added suddenly, 'I must tell somebody, or I shall go mad. Before this terrible thing happened, and poor Frank disappeared, he and I were rivals. And I feel

sometimes so hideous a temptation to be glad that he is gone and out of my way, that it is killing me.' Saying this, he buried his hands and leaned above the table.

'A morbid dread of a foolish shadow, Will, believe me,' his friend said kindly. 'I know you better. A casuist torment, which a man of your conscientious and sensitive nature is safe to create for himself as often he can. No, no, Will. Don't fight phantoms of that sort any longer. Turn daylight on them. You are worn and tired just now. Come into the streets, and let the wind blow the cobwebs from your brain.' He clapped his companion on the shoulder.

Will arose without a word, and they went out together. They passed up the silent walk, and through the narrow way beyond it, and came out at Temple Bar, where they turned westward. As they passed the western church, there broke upon the air the sound of a scattered cheer, and then another and another. A chance acquaintance of Hastings' came by at that moment arm-in-arm with a friend, and turning at the sound of the cheering, lifted his hat and shouted 'Hurrah!'

'What's the matter, Ward?' asked Hastings,

laying his hand upon the arm of the man who cheered. 'Is war declared?'

'Hillo!' cried the other, turning round. 'That you, Hastings? Now, old man, you always said that if there was any fighting to be done, you'd get a commission. Go for it. Now's your time.'

'Is war declared?' Hastings asked again.

'Yes,' roared the other in reply. 'War's declared! Hurrah! Come and join us. We shall sail in less than a week.'

The street was full of excited people. Stranger questioned stranger. Men who had never seen each other before shook hands upon the news, and cheered. Some doubted, some denied, but all were wild at the prospect, and the general heart beat with a fierce joy. Rickety clerks and pale shopmen felt the blood tingle in their thin veins, and were ready to march and fight and die. Most people after this lapse of a quarter of a century have come to believe that the terrible and splendid crusade of '54 was a huge blunder; but the large soul of England was throbbing to the old heroic music then, and beat to another measure than that mean tune of '77, which still jars on our ears.

It was the old great mission on which the sons of this Mother of the Nations were going—to lay the oppressor low, and to succour them that had no other helper, and to hold Europe clean of tyranny. A great purpose, and howsoever it failed or fell, carried through with a great spirit. Ay! and even you—pale shopman and rickety clerk—had a right to cheer in such a cause; and it was well for you that your thin blood ran warm and tingled, and well for the land that bore you that your hearts responded to her call.

Hastings' chance acquaintance went eastward, cheering still, and left the two friends facing each other, pale and excited.

'I shall volunteer,' said Hastings, catching Will by the arm, and walking on rapidly.

'I wish I could,' said Will sighing. He caught his breath at the thought. No; it was not possible. His father was dying. He could not leave him to bear the burden of his griefs alone.

'At last,' said Hastings, hurried by the excitement of the time into forgetfulness of his companion's sorrows and his own—'At last the world had something in it for a man to do. I'm told they fight—these fellows; and

it won't be an easy business. But to think, Will, to think that at last we are let loose with leave to pull that bragging bully down. *Ca ira, ca ira, ca ira,*' he sang under his breath, and marched on wildly, with Will silent at his side.

Hastings went to work next morning; and before Will Fairholt left town, rushed in upon him with news that he was certainly going to the Crimea. Will heard him sadly, but congratulated him with all his heart, and envied him not a little. All *he* could do was to go home, and make the poor old father's last days a little lighter than they could be without him. And he had within him—or so he held it—a greater enemy than the Czar of all the Russias could bring against him. So when the time came, he went back home, and soothed the old man's fretful grief, and buried his own, and lived in outward melancholy quiet, and prayed hard, poor soul, and did his duty, and found no rest.

When Frank read that terrible heading to the paragraph in the morning paper, he sat still for a moment, stunned. Then he smoothed the paper out mechanically, and folded it, and

read the hard dry narrative through. It ran thus:—

'Early yesterday morning, two men, named respectively Isaac Shakell and John Turner, were proceeding to work, when they were arrested by the sight of a well-dressed figure which lay prostrate in the mud in Spaniard's Lane, at a distance of about three hundred yards from the *Spaniard's Inn.* The figure was that of a man of about twenty-five years of age. He was quite dead, and had apparently lain there all night, for his clothes were saturated with mud and rain. Letters were found upon him, addressed to James Groves at the *Spotted Dog Tavern,* Bloomsbury. Inquiries were at once set on foot; and the deceased was immediately identified as the landlord of that well-known hostel. All that is known of this tragic incident is that, at a late hour on the previous evening, the deceased left the *Spaniard's Inn* in the society of two friends, who returned almost at once, and shortly afterwards left the house for that of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, with whom they spent the night. These gentlemen agree in stating that the deceased was in a condition to take care of himself. When the

body was found, the head rested upon a large and jagged stone, upon which he had evidently fallen backwards. Except for the wound thus produced, which was clearly the cause of death, there were no marks of violence upon his person. A pocket in the breast of his overcoat was turned inside out, and a chamois-leather bag, known to have contained the sum of ninety-eight pounds ten shillings in notes and gold, had been abstracted. The police on visiting the spot believed that they could discern evidences of a brief struggle, and their attention being called to a breach in the hedge near at hand, they succeeded in tracing footsteps for some distance. The most singular fact in the whole of this mysterious and tragic business is, that the bag above alluded to was found at the side of the field, at some distance from the track left by the footsteps of the criminal, and that a purse containing a considerable sum of money was found on the person of the deceased. The police have as yet no clue to the perpetrator of this apparently purposeless outrage.'

After this came another paragraph, headed 'Mysterious Restitution;' which set forth that a ticket-porter had delivered a package

containing a sum of one hundred pounds in gold at the *Spotted Dog Tavern*, with the statement that the gentleman who borrowed it on the previous evening in Spaniard's Lane had sent it back again.

All this, understanding it quite clearly, Frank read over, and then laid the paper down. He put on a velvet wideawake, and left the house, and walked quietly away. Nobody paid him any unusual regard, and he walked on, not knowing where he went, and not caring. He passed through Uxbridge and the two Wycombes; and night fell as he entered on that lonely stretch of country which lies northward on the Oxford Road. He had not tasted food or drink, although he had put thirty miles between himself and home since he started. Nor did he feel any want of food or drink, or think of anything but the one consuming terror which dwelt with him. The inexorable terrible past set its pillar of cloud by day before him, and its pillar of fire by night. All day long the sordid and hideous crime of which he had been guilty enacted itself in shadowy form before him, and in the night in glared it fiery lines. Fire seemed within and without him as the weary automatic

feet went on, hour after hour, hour after hour, until, before the eastern skies were grey, he sank from sheer exhaustion, and lay until the sun aroused him from dreams which enacted his crime with horrible iteration. He rose again, and once more the automatic feet carried him on. Where he had lain on the bare road, he was mud from head to heel. His eyes were bleared with the sleepless agony of his soul, and his knees bent beneath him. Country people passing him stared and laughed and pointed, believing him to be tipsy. He scarcely saw them as he staggered by. Coming to a little village inn, he entered, and called for bread-and-cheese and ale. He tendered a sovereign, and was going away without the change, when the host ran after him and placed it in his hand. He took it like a man in a dream, and roamed on again with all his senses clouded by the action of the food he had taken, by the fatigue he had undergone and the aching pains which followed his rest upon the muddy road. Yet the cloudy presentment of his tragedy was still before him in the cloud, and the dry fire of remorse burned on within him. And he knew that though he lived beyond the

uttermost span of human years the fire would burn.

Thus with horrible automatic step, without volition of his own, he walked on slowly and more slowly, until he reached the little town of Thame. It was with no thought of escaping the detecting hand of justice that he avoided the better sort of inns. Exhausted nature cried aloud for food and sleep; but he went wearily about the town until he came upon a little public-house in a by-street, and ate coarse food there ravenously and without relish, and then mounted the rickety stairs, and threw himself upon the uninviting bed and slept. Through the dark hollows of the night his dread walked with him, nameless, indefinable, full of unspeakable fear, unrecognised. When he awoke, he knew the companion of his sleep; and first as an added terror, and then as a first faint gleam of hope, and then again as an added terror came the thought, 'I shall go mad!'

The landlord and the landlady of the place had been discussing him, and when he descended the rickety stairs in the morning, the landlord questioned him.

'Might I make bold to ask where you're agoin', mate?' asked the landlord.

Frank had not thought of going anywhere, but had started on that vainest of all vain enterprises, the attempt to outwalk himself. But he answered 'Liverpool,' thinking that would do as well as another place, and that he would go there.

'You bain't a seafarin' man?' said the landlord, pursuing his inquiry.

'No,' said Frank.

'Lookin' out for a job anywheer?'

'No,' said Frank again.

'Got money, maybe?' said the landlord.

'I have enough to pay your bill,' Frank answered, weary of the questions, but scarcely resenting them.

'That's right enough,' returned the host; 'a man's business *is* a man's business, and yourn ain't mine, and mine ain't yourn. But I suppose you can guess as it looks odd to see a man like you a-coming into a place like this.' Frank returned no answer, though the landlord waited. By-and-by he went on again. 'You've been on the loose, I reckon?'

'Suppose I have,' Frank returned, lifting his eyes for the first time. 'That gives you no right to question me. What do I owe you?'

'That's reasonable enough,' said the land-

lord; 'but a man like you can't help knowin' as it's suspicious-like, don't you see—'

'Will that pay you?' Frank asked, laying five shillings on the table.

'For a gentleman as doesn't want no questions asked, and doesn't want to be interfered with,' said the landlord, 'I think an extra five bob ud be the handsome thing.'

Frank laid down two other half-crowns, and went his way without further question. The landlord looked after him, jingling the ten shillings in his hand as he stood. His wife looked over his shoulder at the retreating limping figure. 'Poor young gentleman!' said she; 'I wonder what's wrong with him? He's in some sort o' trouble.'

'Ah!' said the landlord, shaking his head with an air of prophecy, 'we shall hear of *him* again. He's done something;' and with this sage conclusion, the landlord walked indoors, and threw the ten shillings into the till.

'I thought he was a gentleman,' said the landlady, 'directly I set eyes on him, for all the dirt on his clothes.'

'Anybody could ha' seen that,' said the landlord, 'if he'd had a heavylaunch o' mud on him.'

Frank went onward in the old mood. There was a gap between his common life and this which his mind almost failed to bridge; and he looked back dimly and with a lack of interest not easy to understand, on a happy life which somebody else seemed to have led a long long time ago. And all this time he never said to himself, 'I am miserable,' or 'My punishment is heavy,' or had any really conscious form of thought at all, except for instants of time, when Memory stabbed him, and then he always fell back into the dreamy horror which had before possessed him. Late that night it rained, and he was out upon a lonely road with only one light in sight, and that shone ruby red in the darkness. The road led him towards this light, and the telegraph wires made a mourning noise in the wind as he plashed along below them. Losing the red light now and then among the trees as the road twisted, he found himself suddenly below it, and near a railway arch. A set of wooden steps led towards the rustic railway station, and not knowing why, he stood before them in the rain until the far-off roar and whistle of an approaching train reached his ears. Still scarcely knowing why, he mounted the wet steps, and faced a porter

who was stamping down the platform in a gleaming tarpaulin cloak.

'Going by this train?' said porter. 'She doesn't stop till Rugby.'

'Give me a ticket for Rugby,' Frank answered. It mattered nothing where he went, and he allowed chance to drift him.

The train came lumbering up, and he entered one of the carriages. But for himself it was empty; and as he sat there, the monotonous clank of carriage and engine sent him to sleep, and for an hour he was at peace. But Remorse stood ready for him with that Nessus cloak of torment which she carries, and wrapped him in the fiery shroud when he awoke. So in the rain, he turned into the streets of the familiar town. He had spent the happiest hours of his life, the happiest years there, as many hundreds of English gentlemen had done before, and have done since his day. And as he walked about the silent rainy streets, the magic of things familiar laid a hand upon him, until recalling what he had been, he was seized with such a passion of self-pity, that he laid his head down upon a garden-wall and wept as if his heart would break. As if his heart would break? His heart was broken.

Though pity for himself unsealed his tears—and few men ever weep tears of real passion but at the bidding of their own sorrows, and not another's — his soul, unclouded for a moment, looked back, and saw all whom he had left and lost who loved him, and he wept for their sakes and for the tears which they would weep. And thereby—as I would fain believe—God's hand of healing for the first time touched that sinful and suffering soul. Shine out, Repentance, with angelic eyes, sweet opposite of harsh Remorse, shine out; and lead us to a purer stream than Lethe's, which is all Remorse dare pray for!

CHAPTER VII.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

The mystery in which he moved was unforgotten and unforgetable.

THINGS went smoothly with me at Hartley Hall for many days. Maud was my tutor and my chief companion, and was still the same sad and gentle creature as at first. I learned something of her secret from herself and something from Sally; and looking back on myself at that time, I am inclined to believe that I knew the melancholy story of her lost lover as well as I know it now. It was Sally's one romance; and being at that time of a somewhat romantic turn myself, we fell continually upon it in our talk. Sally was especially fertile in suppositions as to the whereabouts of the lost lover, over whom so singular a mystery hung. She was sanguine of

his return, and of Maud's final happiness; and sometimes amused herself and me by wild imaginations in which she pictured his coming back in a coach-and-four with outriders. After these flights, a reaction generally took place, and she cried, and had mournful thoughts of what should happen if Bob should disappear.

At the close of one of these conversations, which had wound up in the common way, a housemaid tapped at the door of my room, and asked for Mrs. Troman; for by that name Sally was known to the household.

'There's a person at the back wants to see you,' said the housemaid.

'What sort of a person?' asked Sally.

'In black clothes, with a sandy beard on,' the housemaid answered.

'Say I'll be down directly, if you please,' said Sally; and the housemaid departed smiling. My faithful friend gripped me and kissed me, and laughed and wiped her eyes, blushing all the time, and said, as she smoothed her hair with her fingers, 'Master Johnny, I believe it's Bob.'

There was something so comic and so pleased in Sally's fluttered expectation, and I

was so glad at the thought of seeing Bob again, that I laughed and clapped my hands. Sally laughed and clapped *her* hands; and we went down stairs together. There, in a paved yard behind the kitchen stood Bob, attired in funereal, holiday black, and a tall hat, and white thread gloves—like an undertaker's mute. He saluted Sally by one nod of the head, sideways, and said to me, 'Well, young master,' as though he had seen me yesterday. I shook hands with him, and asked him how he did, to which he responded, 'Theer's nothin' the matter wi' me, so fur as *I* know;' and then nodded his head at Sally again. He was so very solemn, that I began to think he had some bad news to communicate; but just as the fear crossed me, he grinned very broadly and winked at Sally, relapsing instantly, and looking as solemn as before. The wink and the grin were accompanied by a backward jerk of the head; and the three taken all together seemed intended as an invitation to 'a more removed ground.' That Sally accepted them in that sense, was evident; for with a brief injunction to us both to wait a moment, she retired into the house, and presently appeared with my cap, and a bonnet for herself. Then

we all walked solemnly into the kitchen-garden, and Bob after his own manner unfolded his purpose. He spoke with a very broad Staffordshire accent and with great deliberation.

'Have yo heerd anythin' about the war we am gooin' to have wi' Roosia?'

'I *have* heard tell of it,' Sally answered.

'Do you remember Bill Hince, Becky Hince's brother?'

'Of course, I do,' said Sally.

'He's 'listed for it,' said Bob, turning his head round slowly in his high shirt collar, and rolling his eyes on Sally, who said, 'Dear me!' in a tone of some distress.

'Yis,' said Bob, still keeping a solemn eye on Sally across his collar; 'he's 'listed, an' he ain't the only one as 'll 'list. Mind that.'

'No?' said Sally, in a questioning way.

'No,' said Bob, biting at the word; 'he ain't. I know a feller as wo't be long behind him, if things bain't altered. I know a feller as 'll goo back to-night, an' 'list to-morrer, if things do't get along more prosperous-like.'

'Dear me!' said Sally, in a tone of disinterested assent.

'Yis,' said Bob, ruffling his beard against his collar, and still keeping his eyes on Sally;

'I know a cove as 'll be off to-morrer, if things ain't altered. An' what's more, he ain't fur off.'

'Really now, said Sally, with an eminently artificial toss of the head; 'you don't say so.'

'I say so,' Bob returned with great gravity. 'Good-bye, Sally.' But Sally released my hand, and stood before him, crying with an hysterical break in her voice, 'Oh no, Bob; you couldn't!'

'I could,' said Bob, stolidly; 'an' what's more, I wull, if things bain't altered. I bain't gooin' to be kep' danglin' no longer. Settle it how you like it. Say "Yis," an I'll stop. Say "No," an' I'll be off an' 'list for the Roosian war to-morrer.'

'O Bob!' cried Sally, 'how can you be so cruel? Think of the child.'

'I've done little else but think o' the chile the last five year,' said Bob a little sulkily.

When things had gone so far, I understood the drift of the conversation perfectly. Sally would not leave me to marry Bob, and Bob was making it a question of choice between us.

'Why,' I asked in a sudden inspiration, 'couldn't Bob come and be a carpenter in the village? Higgs is dead.'

'Higgs is dead, is he, young master?' Bob responded.

Sally, who was on her knees hugging me for the suggestion, looked up, and explained that Higgs now defunct had been the village carpenter; and that since his demise there was nobody of the trade nearer than Wrethedale.

'Will that suit you?' said Bob.

Sally swiftly and slily snatched loose one of my boot-laces as she knelt beside me, and whilst she tied it up with her face very close to the ground, with only her red ears to show how much she was blushing, made answer, 'Yes; it'll suit *me* very well, Bob, if it'll suit you.'

'That's all right, then,' said Bob; and Sally, rising from her knees, adjusted my collar and set my cap with unnecessary exactness; and finally, having kissed me in such a vigorous fashion as to rumple my collar about my ears and knock my cap off, she fell to wiping her eyes with her apron. The matter being thus happily adjusted, they began to discuss ways and means in a calm and business-like fashion, over the remembrance of which I have laughed a hun-

dred times. But Bob had a surprise in store for us, which turned out to be eventually a greater surprise than he intended. When the time had come for him to leave—for he had availed himself of an excursion to the Cathedral city fifteen miles away, to get a cheap journey over here, and was bound to catch the homeward train—he pulled out something from his pocket. It was carefully wrapped up in brown paper, and after the removal of numerous foldings it revealed itself as a gold watch with a handsome chain attached.

'I meant yo to ha' this,' said Bob, 'whether yo said "Yis" or "No." An' now I've got a bone to pick wi' you. Why dissent [didst not] thee call o' me when yo come down last time along o' young master here; eh?'

'Well, Bob,' said Sally taking the watch and chain, wonderingly, from his outstretched hand, 'I ought to ha' come, I know, but we was in such trouble, an' in such a hurry.'

'Trouble,' he repeated. 'What about?'

'Why,' she answered, 'there's a poor young gentleman from over yonder'—she pointed towards Island Hall—'as disappeared suddenlike, nobody knowin' why, an' Master Johnny saw him close by mother's cottage, in clothes

like a workin' man's; and we went there wi' the poor gentleman's brother to see if we could hear anything about him.'

Whilst she spoke Bob regarded her with a look of wonder so remarkable, that she was impelled to take him by the hands; and they stood so, looking into each other's eyes for half a minute.

'Why, the poor creetur,' said Bob at last. 'O Sally, Sally, yo ought to ha' come to me. We might ha' found him. He's gone to the war.'

'What does the man mean?' cried Sally, looking terrified and eager at once.

'Do yo remember, Sally, the night as yo left along o' Johnny an' the lady as come for him?'

'Yes, yes,' she said, and waited.

'That very night, as I was walkin' o'er the Waste, I found a mon i' the road, pretty nigh dead. I thought at fust as he was drunk, but I picked him up, an' found as he seemed nigh dyin'. So I carries him whum wi' me; an' mother, her gets him to bed, an' he lies theer for pretty nigh three we'ks wi' rheumatic fever. He was dressed like a workman, but his hands were all o'er wi' rings an' as pretty as a lady's. Well, one mornin' when we gets up we finds him gone,

an' that theer watch an' chain on the table, an' just a scrap o' paper wrote all shaky like, sayin', "Thenk you; keep it for your trouble."'

'It must be him!' cried Sally. 'But what do you mean by saying he's gone to the war?'

'Why,' said Bob, speaking to the full as eagerly as she, 'Joe Brittle come in one night when he was lyin' theer, and see him abed i' the kitchen, an' about five we'ks later he went into Brummagem o' business, an' see him again with a recruitin' sergeant, an' knowed him at once.'

'Come to Mr. Hartley,' said Sally, laying hands upon him once more—'come to Mr. Hartley. He'd give a thousand pounds for this news.'

We passed into the house. In the eagerness of my interest, I followed Sally to the door of Uncle Ben's private room, furnished—like no other apartment I had ever seen at that time—in the fashion of a business-office. There Sally poured out an incoherent breathless story, finishing up by placing the watch in Mr. Hartley's hands.

Uncle Ben rose in a state of great excitement.

'Bring the man here at once,' he said.—'Tell me what you know about this feller, Johnny.'

I told him briefly what I knew of Sally's sweetheart. There was very little to tell; but before I had well done, Sally, in defiance of all decorum, came bursting into the room with Bob behind her. The examination lasted but a few minutes. I was sent from the room whilst Bob told his story, and being called back again, told mine. Uncle Ben sat down at a table, and wrote one or two hasty lines, telling Sally to ring the bell meanwhile. He gave an order that a horse should be saddled, and that the groom should ride at speed to Island Hall with a note for Mr. William Fairholt. Then we were all dismissed for the time, and as we left the room Uncle Ben took the watch to the window, where he examined it with great closeness.

I should be satisfied if I could convey only a hint of the manner in which this reappearance of the stranger whom I had seen beside the clay pit affected me. I speak of this renewal of my memories of him as a reappearance advisedly, and without exaggeration. He came back to my mind as clearly as though I

had only seen him yesterday, with all the sense of mystery which belonged to him, and all the terror he inspired. And in a way which is common to imaginative children I began in fancy to associate my life with his, until for the time I was absolutely certain that by me, or in some occult manner through me, and only by or through me, the mystery would be cleared, and the lost man discovered. It would have been stranger than it was, if my enforced association with his history had not seemed strange. I had been deeply impressed by the discovery of his identity when I went down with Sally to our old home in the Black Country, but this last reiteration of my own part in the story made the mark deeper. I will not forestall the tale I have to tell, yet it seems to me now not less marvellous than it seemed then. I, a child playing neglectedly in the Black Country, encounter, by what seems the wildest accident of chance, a relative of mine who for some inexplicable reason has thrown away the most brilliant hopes and snapped the promise of a happy life in two. Three days later, by what seemed but an accident of chance, I find myself, not knowing it, settled in the home he has for ever deserted. Further

on, lest I should lose the remembrance of his face, he appears again, is identified, and so stamps his own portrait on my brain, that I could not fail to know him if I saw him among ten thousand. Yet again I find the very garments he wore when I first saw him, and with them the link between the well-dressed and the ill-dressed stranger. Yet again through my migration here, I draw my old nurse's sweetheart to the only place in the world where the story he had to tell could have been even of the faintest service.

Henceforth Frank Fairholt and the mystery in which he moved were unforgotten and unforgetable.

Whilst I still pondered these things in my childish mind, Cousin Will, with the groom a little way behind him, came pounding along the avenue on horseback, and made straight for the hall-door, as if he would have ridden into the house. He pulled up within a yard or two of the steps, dismounted, and hurried in. He was closeted with Uncle Ben for perhaps a quarter of an hour, when Bob and Sally were sent for, and I was left alone. Before another quarter of an hour had gone by, he was away again. It was arranged that a bed

should be found for Bob, and that he should leave on the morrow. I was not as a rule allowed to go about the servants' quarters, but on this occasion nobody interfered with me, and Bob and Sally being formally invited to the housekeeper's room, I invited myself thither, and we spent the evening together. The talk was all of young Mr. Fairholt and Miss Maud; and the housekeeper described to us how clever and how handsome young Mr. Fairholt was, and what a favourite in the county. She was a very stately old lady, was the housekeeper, and I had an idea that she would have rather looked down on Bob on common occasions, and that it was only the interest she felt in the singular story of which his narrative formed a part, which induced her so to condescend to him at all. But Bob was very respectful, and very communicative. He remembered all the things his mother had told him about the stranger's broken sayings in his illness, and repeated some of them, which left no doubt upon our minds, and could leave no doubt upon the mind of any, of the sick man's identity. When the time came for me to go to bed, I thought all these things over and

drifted into sleep with the strangest mixture in my mind of myself and them. In my dreams they mingled again with all the figures I had known. On all these confused and intricate fancies a red light seemed to fall, and I came back to my old bedroom again, and heard a voice say brokenly, 'It was God's hand that brought him here.' Looking up, I saw Maud and Uncle Ben regarding me together. There were traces of new tears upon her face, but there was a light of hope upon it too, by which it seemed almost transfigured. Uncle Ben put out his hand and stroked my hair when he saw I was awake, and bade me go to sleep again. They both kissed me, and went away quietly with the lamp, leaving the suffering and hope of Maud's face somehow present with me. They touched me vaguely, yet keenly, into tears; and before I fell asleep again I knelt in my bed and prayed that she might be comforted, and her hope fulfilled.

I was present on the morrow at another conference between Sally and her lover, in the course of which it was definitely arranged that Bob, who had saved a little money, should migrate to the village, bringing his mother with him, and that as soon as it could be seen

how things were likely to turn out, they should be married, allowing always that the prospect seemed favourable. Before he went away in the afternoon, Uncle Ben sent for him, and after being absent for about five minutes, Bob returned, with a beaming countenance.

'I took the freedom, like,' said Bob, 'of tellin' of him, as a man may say, as I was a comin' here to settle down; and he gin me this.' Opening his hand, he displayed two or three gold coins cautiously, and closed his fingers over them again. 'He seems to be wonderful pleased at havin' come across anybody as knowed the poor young gentleman; and the young gentleman's brother is a-goin' down wi' me to find Joe Brittle, an' see if he can find the recruitin' sergeant.'

Not long after this, Cousin Will drove up in the dog-cart; and Bob taking his place behind with the groom was whirled away to the railway station.

Perhaps three weeks later, as nearly as, after this interval, I can compute the time, Mr. Fairholt, Cousin Will, and a gentleman whom I had not seen before, were at Uncle Ben's table at luncheon. Mr. Fairholt looked greatly aged, and the irritability of his manner had

notably increased. Everybody treated him with an air of pitiful respect, and I thought I noticed that he resented this. The gentleman whom I had not seen before had blue eyes, and a complexion like a lady's. He wore his hair rather long, and it was parted in the middle, and golden, like a girl's. He had a long silky light-coloured moustache, with which he played with delicate and much jewelled fingers. He was dressed in black, and seemed very languid and quiet. I sat next to Maud, who somewhat to my humiliation minced my food for me as she was in the habit of doing. I could see that she was in a state of much agitation, and I noticed that Cousin Will glanced at her often with a pained and anxious look. There was but little talk during the progress of the meal. There were no servants present, but the conversation on indifferent matters went very dismally, and nobody seemed inclined to eat.

'Well, Mr. Fairholt,' said Uncle Ben at last addressing Cousin Will, 'I think you've taken the very best course as could be taken, and I wish you luck. Here's to you. And I hope as Them Above'll guide you, and bring you safe back again.' He poured out a glass of claret with a shaky hand, and his eyes glistened as he drank it.

'I would rather not discuss this question, now,' said old Mr. Fairholt in an absent tremulous way. Then turning to me, he added, 'You can run into the garden, Johnny, and amuse yourself.'

'Oh, never mind the child,' said Uncle Ben, with a jovial loudness which it was easy to see was not quite natural to him at the moment; 'he's all right where he is. I think Mr. William's right in not takin' a commission, Mr. Fairholt. It might hamper his movements, and keep him from coming back again with a good grace. If you find him,' he said, turning again to Cousin Will, 'well and good. You can fight it through then, and get attached to his regiment, no doubt, and bring him to reason, an' anyhow he'll have somebody to look after him. If you want any influence used at home, let me know, and all I can do, I will do.'

'I am assured of that, Mr. Hartley,' said Cousin Will.

'An' you'll sail together?' said Uncle Ben turning to the lady-like gentleman. The lady-like gentleman nodded. 'The Lieutenant's out theer a'ready,' said Uncle Ben. 'If you meet him, you tell him not to

be afraid of anythin'; not even of drawin' on his father. Tho' I never knowed him to be particular afraid of that, neither.' He chuckled as he said this, and turned round on Mr. Fairholt. 'That *ain't* a thing as they're afraid of as a rule.—Is it Mister?'

'There is a circumstance, sir,' said Mr. Fairholt, 'of which you cannot claim ignorance, which might have restrained that question.'

Uncle Ben arose and stretching out his hand to Mr. Fairholt, cried, 'I beg your pardon, sir. Nothin' meant, I do assure you. I wouldn't, for the world.'

Mr. Fairholt arose stiffly, and feigning not to see the outstretched hand before him, said, 'I came to your house, Mr. Hartley, at my son's request, to recognise what he chose to regard as a quite disinterested friendship for his brother, and a kindly interest in his unhappy fate. I was not ignorant, sir, of the motive which created your regard for my poor Francis, and it is a comfort to me in the midst of my sorrow to know that your plan is frustrated. But I should have carried my knowledge away with me silently, but for the open and gratuitous insult you have now put upon me. I wish you a very good-day, sir.'

He started to go, overturning his chair in his haste, but he paused at the sound of Uncle Ben's voice. Casting a frightened look about the table, I saw that the one stranger to me was regarding Mr. Fairholt with a look of languid curiosity, and that Maud and Will and Uncle Ben were all pained, though evidently in different ways.

'You're an old man, sir,' said Uncle Ben, 'an' I've been told you're a gentleman, an' you've had a lot o' trouble, as I'm well aware. Now them's three claims as you've got on my respect, and I'll bear 'em in mind. But don't *you* come into *my* house again, till you've changed your opinion o' *me*. As for what you may say about motives, why, look here, I can give my niece enough to make a Dook glad of her, if I like, let alone a country gentleman.'

'Mr. Hartley!' said Will in a low tone of remonstrance. Uncle Ben's eyes following the direction of the other's glance, fell upon Maud, who was blushing painfully. She cast an appealing glance at her uncle, and hurried from the room.

'All the same,' Uncle Ben went on, 'I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, and I didn't mean

to do it; an' between man an' man I won't and can't say more.'

'I am sure, father,' said Will, 'that Mr. Hartley had no wish to offend.'

'I do not care,' said Mr. Fairholt, 'to be troubled with an endeavour which would probably be perpetual to distinguish between the desire to offend and the incapacity to avoid the commission of offences. I accept Mr. Hartley's apology; and I believe he had no wish to hurt my feelings by his very inconsiderate speech. But I will take Mr. Hartley at his word, and will not intrude again upon his hospitality.' With that Mr. Fairholt left the room, with an air of quavering dignity, having first bowed to Uncle Ben, who regarded him with a stern and unbending countenance. Cousin Will stood for a moment as if uncertain how to act. Recovering himself, he spoke a few hasty words to Uncle Ben, and hurried out of the room after Mr. Fairholt. The lady-like gentleman all the time remained seated, and when Will had gone he faced round in his chair and looked at his host. Uncle Ben shook his head gravely, and quitted the room by the door through which Maud had passed. The stranger beckoned me across

to him with his forefinger, and told me a fairy story, of which I can remember nothing now, but that there was a droll blue-bottle in it, whose singular sayings and doings convulsed me with laughter. He began his narrative with no sort of preface or exordium; and when he had finished it he rose gravely, shook hands with me with much ceremony, and walked to the door. I had been delighted with the fairy tale, but this curious behaviour rather disconcerted me. I suppose my looks expressed it, for he turned round gaily and said that I should arrive some day at man's estate, and that I was never to forget that the two things which made small boys happy were fairy tales and tips. Then taking a sovereign from a netted purse, he put it into my hand. 'Be this,' he said, laying one hand upon my head, and striking an extravagant attitude, 'the soldier's epitaph graven on thy young heart. "He, a stranger, unfolded to my young mind the veracious history of the comic fly, and tipped me a quid at parting." Fare thee well.' With that he patted my head rather heavily, and went out with a walk which I afterwards discovered to be an imitation of that of Mr. Charles Kean, but

which seemed to me at the time a very extraordinary performance. I was not at all sure that the lady-like gentleman might not be a harmless lunatic. I ventured that night to put the suggestion before Maud, who rebuked me for it, and told me that Mr. Hastings was very clever indeed, and that he was going out, like a brave man, to fight against the Russians in the Crimea—'and to try to find—' she said, but checked herself suddenly, and walked away. I followed her to the window and slid my hand into hers to comfort her. She drew me to her side, and we sat there whilst the mist and the darkness met each other and hid from us the trees which surrounded Island Hall. But when I looked, I saw a light upon her face, and as the shadows gathered round us, she sang to me.

CHAPTER VIII.

HISTORY.

'Does dog eat dog in your part of the country?'

A VOICE had sounded in half-conscious ears for such ages of time, that when it broke upon the light slumbers of receding fever, it seemed altogether familiar. Yet the room in which the half-awakened man found himself was strange to him. The walls were whitewashed, and hung with cheap prints of Scripture subjects. From one of the rafters in the low ceiling hung a dried and withered scrap of misletoe, and bits of dead holly were stuck about the pictures on the walls. It was night-time, and there was a red flicker of firelight on the walls and roof, on which these objects reeled before his eye. An eight-day clock ticked with slow and remorseless monitory sound behind him. The voice talked

on, and the sick man still half drowsing, listened to it with a dim sense of wonder. Whose was the voice, and where had he heard it before? It had no associations for him. Yes; it asked him to drink long since, and came with the hands that smoothed his pillow, an hour or a year ago—which was it?—calling him 'Poor creature' with a pitiful accent. Another voice broke in, gruff and bassoon-like, and the sick man became broad awake. There were two people seated at the fireside before him, a man and a woman. The man's back was turned to him; but he could see the woman's face. A good face and a kindly, with a widow's cap round it, and smooth bands of grey hair below the white border. She was looking at the fire whilst her companion spoke. The man's accent was quaint, and here and there the listener lost a word, but the meaning was plain enough.

'The poor creetur,' said the man, 'might ha' done summat wrong for aught as we knowin'; an' if he's a-runnin' away from the police, it wouldn't be a nice thing for we to gi'e him up, do you see?'

'I can't help thinkin', Robert,' said the

woman, with her eyes upon the fire, 'as we ought to tell 'em as he's here. Becos you see, if his poor mother misses him—think o' that! What should I do, if yo was to goo a-wanderin' about the country, as he's a-doin', poor thing?'

'Yis,' returned the man; 'that's right enough. But s'posin as I was to goo an' fatch the parson, an' let him see him, now he's gettin' better. Yo see, mother, it eeu't our business to gi' folks up to the police, 'specially when they've been a-lyin' in our house for three we'ks at a time. It wouldn't seem fair, like.'

'P'r'aps it'll be better to fatch the parson to him, as yo sayin', Robert,' the woman returned. 'An' p'r'aps it'll be better to wait a day or two till he gits a bit stronger.'

'He eeu't well yit,' said the man, rising as he spoke and crossing over to the bed. The patient closed his eyes and feigned sleep. His heart beat wildly. It was impossible that he should submit to the benevolent plot these people were laying for his welfare. But was it possible that he could escape? Could he muster strength enough to walk, before the day or two's respite the woman

proposed had expired? For he knew that he was terribly weak, and that he had been a long time ill. The resolve grew up desperately in his heart, and said within himself that he *would* be strong enough to escape, and that, whether he lived or died, he would take the first chance of flight.

The man bent above him and listened to the breathing of the patient. The patient knowing this, controlled himself, breathing regularly and softly.

'He's havin' a nice sleep,' said the gruff voice. 'Yo go to bed, mother, an' I'll sit up wi' him for an hour or two, an' see if he wants anythin'.'

The mother kissed her son and bade him good-night. The patient heard her ascend the uncarpeted stair, and listened to her feet as they went to and fro in the room above until silence came again, broken only by the ticking of the clock, the occasional noise of ashes falling from the fire, and the shuffle of the watcher's heavy boots. After a dreary time the clock began a faint and dismal gurgle, indicative of a sleepy desire to strike the hour. This passed away, and came again, and passed away again, and at last the clock

wheezed and tinkled eleven. The watcher arose and went out at the door, returning almost immediately with a great lump of coal, which he placed upon the fire. Having banked this all around with ashes, he made fast the door, took off his boots, and went silently upstairs, pausing on the first stair to look back at his patient, and then closing the stair-door behind him.

The sick man lay in almost breathless silence and listened until the last movement in the house was still. Then with great pain and difficulty he dragged himself into a sitting posture. Once as he struggled the bed creaked loudly, and he lay down again, and made shift to pull the clothes about him, fearful lest his attempt should be discovered. He lay there sweating and panting for a while, and the clock behind ticked threats at him. The room was dark, and the shadowy corners held vague terrors. Suddenly a great tongue of flame darted through the bank of ashes, and made those recesses visible. Some of the ashes dropped into the fender, and the sudden noise sent another pang of fear to his heart. The flame broadened, and a ruddy glow played hide-and-seek with the shadows.

The glow gathered strength, and the shadows faded until the room was light enough to read in. With painful slowness the sick man wrestled himself out of bed, and walked tottteringly to where a few rough garments lay thrown across a chair. They were a heavy burden to him as he went back to the bed. One by one, with great difficulty he put on these garments, pausing often to rest meanwhile, and panting heavily. Suddenly he looked at his hands, as if for the first time missing something. Searching the pockets of the rough clothes he had assumed, he found wrapped in paper several rings, which glistened in the firelight. One of these he kissed passionately, whilst tears chased each other down his face. After a pause he put them back again, and drew from another pocket a watch and chain and a purse.

For some time he regarded these thoughtfully, then returning the purse to his pocket, he took out a pocket-book, and wrote in it by the firelight, in a hand as shaky as that of Guy Fawkes after the rack, these words, 'Thank you. Keep this for your trouble.' He tore the leaf from the book, and laying it on the table, placed the watch and chain upon it.

As he tottered back towards the bed, the flame which had hitherto lighted him shrank suddenly, and in the darkness he lurched against a chair, which jarred and scraped along the quarried floor. He listened for a full minute in an agony of apprehension; but no other sound following, he went feeling his way with his feet inch by inch along the floor until he found the bed again. All this time bodily pains racked him until he could have cried aloud. The flame rose again, and once more the little room was filled with broad light. He made search for hat and boots, and after some little trouble, found those belonging to himself. Boots in hand he made for the door, carefully and quietly loosed the primitive fastening, and in another moment was out in the night. A distant church clock chimed the half-hour as the first cool breath of the open air touched his forehead. He pulled the door close again, fixed the hasp, drew on his boots, and stole cautiously away. Every movement cost him an inexpressible pang; but he went doggedly on, not caring whither, so that the road led him from discovery. The full moon hung pale and watery amongst ragged clouds, and lent a faint light to his steps. All the

low-lying sky to east and west and north and south was aglow with the colour of molten metal, and he was belted round with fires that leaped with flickering tongues towards that sullen and lurid heaven. As he dragged his miserable body along, memory was busy with him; though how he had come to the house in which he had found himself but a few hours ago, and who were the people who had nursed him in his illness, he neither knew nor cared. His bodily pains gave his mind no ease, now that memory was once more awakened; but his heart was moved to pity for his father and his lover rather than for himself; for he said, sitting in judgment upon himself, that these things which he endured were for him but a slight penalty. And so, in agony of body and grief of heart and remorse of soul unspeakable, he went his way.

It was an hour after midnight when he paused before a pair of great gates of iron, and glancing through the bars, beheld a scene which looked as though it were translated clean from Pandemonium. In the glow of great fires, beneath low-pitched sheds open on all sides to the night, half-naked men toiled in the swink and sweat of a labour the like of

which he had never seen. In the dusky light and half-opaque yet gleaming shadow of the place, the bare bodies shone like red-hot bronze. Out of one of the furnaces was drawn an enormous 'bloom,' which cast an almost insupportable light and heat to where he stood; and this being swung beneath a Nasmyth hammer, the ponderous weight crashed down upon it, and drove myriads of sparkles into the night. 'What a picture!' thought the wanderer outside, 'if one could only paint it;' and for just a minute he went free of sorrow, and thought of nothing but the sight before him. The air was warm, and comforting to his sore limbs. He was weaker than he knew, and as he stood there he felt his knees fail him, and with his hands upon the bars of the gate he slid helplessly down. A little door in the projecting wall beside the gate opened, and a man came out.

'Hillo, mate!' said the man gruffly; 'what's the matter wi' yo?'

Frank turned his hollow eyes and his pale face upon him.

'Can I go inside and sit down a little?' he asked. 'I am very weak and tired.'

'Yo look it,' the man made answer, not un-

kindly. 'Why, yo am as cold's death. Here; let me get my arm under thee. Now then; come along.'

He helped the wayfarer into a sort of rough office, where a fire blazed brightly upon the hearth, and set him in an arm-chair before it.

'What's the matter, mate?' he asked.

'I have been ill,' Frank made answer; 'and I—I have lost my way.'

'Which way are yo gooin'?' the man asked again.

'To Liverpool,' Frank made answer, faintly.

'All right,' said the man, poking the glowing fire with a rough bar of iron. 'There's one of our boats gooin' on as fur as 'Hampton i' the mornin', an' yo can get a lift on that.' He settled the wanderer in the chair much as he would have handled a child, and added, 'Now, yo go to sleep theer; an' when it's time to start, I'll come an' wake thee.'

Before the kindly forgeman had well gone, Frank was asleep. He slept until the grey light of morning crept through the dingy window of the office; and would have slept on still, but that the forgeman returned and shook him by the shoulder, saying that the boat was ready. He rose and followed his guide, who

led him along a path paved with crackling sheet-iron, and lined on one side by furnaces, and on the other by cumbrous machinery. A sudden turn to the right brought them to a canal, where a boat, laden with iron bars, was ready to start upon its journey.

'Here he is, Jim!' shouted the forgeman to a rough-looking fellow on the far side of the canal. 'Jump down,' he added to Frank; 'they'm ready to goo.'

Frank drew a shilling from his pocket and offered it to the forgeman. The man drew back with an offended air.

'Does dog eat dog in your part of the country?' he asked.

'I beg your pardon,' Frank said meekly; 'I am very much obliged to you. Good day.'

He held out his hand without the shilling. The man shook hands with him surlily, watched him as he stumbled awkwardly and painfully into the boat, and turned away. The boatman called to the four sturdy horses, who stood with each his nose buried in a tin of provender suspended from his head-gear. Frank sat upon the roof of the cabin; and the boat glided through the vile water, past wharfs piled high with coal in solid squares—past

fleets of boats laden with coal and bricks and timber, and iron in every form, and harmless uncharged shells awaiting the order for the arsenal—past furnaces whose roar made the air tremulous, and huge steam-hammers, the noise of whose falling came with a shock upon the air like the discharge of siege-artillery—then past great spaces of waste land with dismal pools of weedy water festering in them, and here and there a dejected leafless tree, whose barren branches drooping seemed to mourn their own decay—past long lines of chimney-stacks, whose volleying clouds insulted and obscured the heavens—past the clanking noise and rancid steam of colliery engines; and all the while, as the foul water gurgled at the bows, and slipped greasily along the side of the boat, the watcher saw these things, and did not see them, for his mournful self-accusing thoughts were far away. As he sat thus, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and turning round, he saw a pleasant-looking, brown-faced woman, who proffered him a cup of tea.

'It'll do you good, master,' she said kindly; 'an' I've put a drop o' whisky in it, as'll warm thee up a bit.'

He took it gratefully; and the woman nodding at him with a cheerful smile, went back over the roof of the cabin and into her small house below. The tea was a mere excuse for hot grog, as Frank discovered on tasting it. But it sent warmth through his starven frame and comforted him. He set the cup down after emptying it, and sleep came upon him again. When he awoke, he found himself snug and warm beneath a blanket and a heavy tarpaulin. He heard the rain pattering without upon it, and lay still. 'If these people knew,' he thought, scarcely daring to give his terrible reflection even a mental form, 'that they were harbouring a highway robber and a murderer, how they would shrink from me!'

But my reader will know that these thoughts were always with him in his wanderings, and I will not weaken my story by driving repetition into the region of commonplaces. It is enough to know that such a man had fallen to such a crime. Every instinct in him revolted from himself, and stood there in passionate hatred and detestation of his crime. Every fibre of his soul thrilled with intense desire after an impossible revolution.

When the Psalmist cries, 'The pains of hell gat hold upon me,' be sure that the pangs which racked him were the bitter fruit of his own remorse. In the one hell which mercy has made possible for the human soul, the criminal lives in companionship with his own crime, and loathes it with an inexpressible loathing.

Wolverhampton was reached at last, and Frank's offer of payment was again rebuffed. He bade those who had entertained him good-bye, and crawled up the wharf into a dirty and narrow street in the rear. Along this he walked feebly, and found by-and-by a strange object at his side keeping pace with him. It was a man, apparently about fifty years of age, bent, and gnarled, and grizzled almost out of human seeming. A black patch obscured his left eye, his hands were yellow, and claw-like, and dirty. His clothes were a heterogeneous jumble. Half a sack with three holes in it—one for the head, and one for each arm—did duty as a coat. The sleeves had served a broad-cloth garment once, and in the breaches of their shaky junction with the sacking, showed the man's bare skin. His feet were shoeless, but wrapped in fold on fold of rags, so that

his steps fell noiselessly on the muddy pathway. Torn corduroy trousers, much too large for him, and a silk hat which would better have become a dunghill than a human head, completed his attire. A bristly beard and moustache of dirty white stood in uncompromising straightness from lip and cheek and chin, a full inch long, without the symptom of a curl.

'On the road, young man?' said this apparition. 'So am I. You don't seem to get along in a very lively way.—No answer? Well, companion, you may be a swell in your own line, and you may be as lofty as you like with me. I'm used to meeting lofty people. I was lofty myself once. Got a bit o' bacca?—No? Then I shall be compelled to use my own. Have a pipe?—No again? Neither civility nor conversation. Perhaps you're a decent working-man, and don't care to be seen walking with a scarecrow. All right. Wait till we come to the end of the road, and I'll relieve you. But I'm fond of society; I always was. Society has been my ruin, I do assure you. I'm a monument erected by Providence to warn the whole human species against the wiles of their brothers and sisters. That's what's the matter with me, I do assure you.'

Frank stopped short. The man's insolent flippancy was intolerable to him.

'Choose your way,' he said, with some faint reflection of his old manner, 'and I will choose another.'

'A gentleman!' cried the creature, with a grating laugh. 'Buono giorno, excellenza! A swell, and nothing short of it. Au plaisir, monseigneur. I was a swell myself once, but it's so long ago that I'm almost ashamed of the remembrance. Not quite ashamed, you know, because I'm hardened. Yes, my friend, I'm hardened—quite hardened, I do assure you.'

'Oblige me by choosing your way,' Frank answered. The old man leered up at him, laughing, filling his pipe meanwhile. Frank resumed his walk, not looking behind him. He came into a more populous street after a time, and looked about him for some humble place of refreshment into which he could venture without exciting surprise by his attire. He saw at length a cook-shop which seemed to belong to a rather better class than he had hoped to find in such a neighbourhood, and entering, sat down at an unclothed wooden table. A slipshod, slatternly girl appeared

before him and asked what he wanted. He ordered food, and she went away, returning by-and-by with a woman, who repeated the girl's inquiry.

'You don't look none of the most respectable,' said the woman glancing at him scornfully. 'I should like to see the colour o' your money first.'

Frank drew out his purse, thinking he would have to change gold some time, and that he might as well change it here as elsewhere. What was to become of him when his slender store of money was gone, was a question which had not yet occurred to him. He drew a sovereign from his purse, and handed it to the woman, who bit it and rang it on the table, and then handed it to the girl, bidding her go for change. With an altered manner, she proceeded to lay a cloth upon the table, and after a time brought in a mutton chop and a cup of tea. These Frank despatched; and feeling a little stronger, took his change, and went away again. He made no inquiries as to the road, but took that which lay before him. The day cleared as it grew older, and by noon the air felt warm and pleasant. He had often to rest by the wayside, and was so

weak that he had not made more than four miles when night began to fall. The lamps were already alight in the town he came to; and he felt more desolate and alone than ever as he entered the uninviting street. A grating voice rose from near his elbow, and looking down, he saw the man who had addressed him in the morning.

'Well, my gay companion,' said the intrusive tramp, speaking past a short black pipe which he held between his teeth, 'how do you find yourself now? I can't say you're the best pedestrian I ever met with in my life. It's my belief, sir, that Captain Barclay would have beaten you off your legs. Where are you going to? Don't know the town, I'll bet a tanner. This is the town of Bilston, my eminent stroller; and I am a welcome and a well-known lodger at the best crib in the place. Come along; capital accommodation. The beds are threepence, and clean, for a wonder. Cooking gratis, but you do your own; and they won't keep *me* waiting for the frying-pan. This turning—third door to the right.' Saying this, he took Frank by the sleeve, and led him into a dismal entry, and through an open door into a large quar-

ried kitchen, where two or three people sat talking round a great fire.

'Sit down there,' he said in an undertone, forcing Frank to a seat on a bench, 'Nobody will notice you. Hallo, mother! Got a couple of nice beds for two gentleman wanderers, eh?'

Frank was too weary and exhausted to resist, and was almost too weak to have a will in the matter at all. Why, he thought, should one place seem worse or better than another now? After a little space of time, during which the man had bargained with the mistress of the place, and Frank had almost fallen asleep, he felt himself pulled gently by the sleeve. His unwelcome comrade whispered to him, 'I've paid for the beds, companion, and I'm cleaned out. Just lend me a shilling, and I'll get some grub, and make tea for both of us.'

Frank gave the man a shilling, inwardly resolving that he would take train to somewhere next day, and escape this fellow. The tramp went out; and returned with an ounce of tea and two ounces of sugar, wrapped in separate screws of paper, a halfpennyworth of milk in a cracked and discoloured half-gallon

jug, a loaf, and a rasher of bacon in a scrap of newspaper. Of the banquet prepared from these materials, Frank declined to partake, and the man in the sack made unto himself a plenteous feast. As the evening waned, the society in the kitchen thickened. Had Frank been less miserably circumstanced, the people amongst whom he sat would have been full of picturesque interest for him; but he only felt now the shame of mingling with them, and the deserved wretchedness of his own lot. He drowsed often in the course of the evening, and lost his surroundings and himself. He was awakened at last by the mistress of the place, who handed him a diminutive scrap of candle, which adhered by its own grease to a shard which had once been part of a willow-patterned plate. The old man led him upstairs and pointed to his bed. It was one of a dozen in a large, low-roofed, barrack-like apartment. The thought of undressing in such a den was repugnant to every nerve in him. He drew off his boots, and lay down in the rough clothes he wore, and fell into the dreamless sleep of pure fatigue. When he awoke in the morning he was alone; and he left the house without

speaking to any one, and took the way once more. Two or three hours later, he discovered that his purse was gone, and that his whole stock of money was represented by twenty-two shillings in silver.

CHAPTER IX.

HISTORY.

'It's a very curious case, ladies and gentlemen. Notice two or three things about it.'

FOR the first time, Frank began to think of the future which lay before him. Despair has no capacity for fear, and the time to come looked blank, but not terrible. There would come a time before long when his last penny would be spent, and after that he would die of starvation. If he were found, an inquest would be held upon him. So then he must destroy the last trace of his identity. As he crawled along the road in the chill sunshine, he took out his pocket-book, and tore from it carefully all the leaves on which any sort of memoranda had been written. These he scattered in fragments at long intervals; and the remnant of the book he

dropped into the sluggard waters of a canal. Though he was still in great pain, he was stronger than he had been at starting, and still walking without care as to the direction he took, he came at nightfall to Hockley Hill, and found himself on the outskirts of the great Midland capital. He had walked nine miles that day, and felt quite broken down with fatigue. He had not penetrated far into the town when he saw the sign of a pawnbroker, and a new idea occurred to him. The rings he had about him would surely serve to identify him. Some of them were valuable, were even costly; and he had an indefinite sort of fancy that though he had a right to die when his last coin failed him, he had no right to hasten death for his own relief, or to avoid any such open means for prolonging life as the rings afforded. Dim and undefined as this feeling was within him, it was yet the first dawn of a sense of returning duty. He entered the pawnbroker's shop, and proffered the rings—all but one. That was Maud's gift, and he would not part with it until he knew that the end of all was near. Then he resolved that he would bury it in some quiet place in the fields, and lie down

near that last relic of his love, and die there. Whilst he thought of these things, and seemed to see in fancy the place where he should lie, the pawnbroker was examining the rings through a glass. He laid them down on the counter and looked at the man who proffered them. He saw a man who, in dress, looked like one of the poorer sort of labourers from the outlying mining districts—a man haggard with a month's beard, pallid with sickness, bent with fatigue and pain, hollow-eyed, unwashed—a melancholy spectacle.

'How did you come by these rings?' he asked, taking in all those mournful characteristics at a glance.

'They are my own property,' Frank answered; 'and you need not be afraid to take them.'

'H'm!' said the pawnbroker. 'Where do you live?'

'I have no address,' Frank made answer; 'I am going to Liverpool.'

The man looked keenly at the rings and at their owner. 'I'll lend five pounds on 'em,' he said, and drew them towards him.

It was with no care for the money, but only for the dim thought that he had no right to

lay down the burden of his punishment before his time, that Frank, taking up one of the rings, responded, 'I gave forty-five pounds for this alone.'

'Daresay,' said the man briefly. 'I don't know that I ought to take 'em in at all, unless you give some account of yourself. I won't give more than five pounds for 'em.'

Frank assented wearily; and the pawnbroke without asking further questions made out, at the cost of a penny, a ticket, and paid four founds nineteen shillings and elevenpence across the counter. The pawnbroker was something of a fictionist, and having given his imagination scope, had invented the name and address of 'Joseph Jones, Summer Lane.' 'If I am discovered,' Frank thought, 'inquiries will be made here.' He tore the ticket stealthily bit by bit in his pocket, and dropped a piece here and there until it was all gone. Then not caring to inquire of any one he met, he wandered down street after street, looking for an advertisement of lodgings. He saw many, but avoided them all, for some no-reason, until some no-reason drew him into one. The old man who kept the place came forward and demanded his fee; and

being satisfied, marshalled his visitor to the fireplace, where in a shadowy recess sat the intrusive tramp of yesterday. There were perhaps a dozen people in the kitchen; and Frank, neither observant nor observed except by his yesterday's acquaintance, took the seat pointed out to him. That one should enter dejected, travel-soiled, and weary, was not a thing to excite attention there, and he was glad to be unnoticed. The men and women about him discussed the things which interested themselves. They were all professional tramps and cadgers, and though they might be strangers to each other, they had common friends in the trade. Thus the wooden-legged miner had met the one-armed warrior's particular friend at Leicester the week before last, and the one-armed soldier had recently made the acquaintance of the wooden-legged miner's ancient companion and sworn brother at Worcester. The talk drifted hither and thither, until a new-comer, who had walked from Dudley, brought news of a dreadful murder committed there the night before. On this they all seized with avidity. The new-comer was a hero for the time, and told his tale with sickening amplitude of nauseous

circumstance. The chief point of the story was that not the slightest clue to the murderer had declared itself; and from this point the talk flowed on in an unbroken stream of reminiscence of undiscovered crime. Frank sat in his shadowed corner with bent head and folded arms, until one began the story of the mysterious murder and robbery in Spaniard's Lane. He listened to the talk like a man in a nightmare. It was not wonderful to know that the history of his crime was public property; but as he sat with closed eyes and eager ears and trembling heart, he seemed to feel a strong and resolute hand approaching him in the darkness, whilst invisible walls narrowed in upon him, and invisible fetters held him from escape. He learned that the two men who had accompanied the DEAD—the speaker put it in that way every time he made mention of the murdered man—had been arrested and discharged.

A woman broke out with, 'Throth, thin if 'twas meself had done the murther, an' another was *had* for it, I wouldn't lie aisy in me grave till I give meself up.'

'Thrue for you, Nelly,' said the woman's husband. 'It's base conduct.'

What's human creature's opinion could Frank Fairholt afford to despise? He had never until now contemplated the possibility of another being charged with his crime, and the knowledge that these innocent men had been suspected laid an added weight upon him; although he told himself, and that truly, that he was not hiding from justice for his own sake. He would have welcomed any atonement, however fiery, if the shadow of his sin might fall no more heavily than it had done upon his father and his brother and Maud. When the first madness of his flight was gone, he had resolved on sacrifice; and since then his only hope had been that he might die obscurely and be forgotten. He could think more clearly now, not because the night of his trouble was more lightened, but bcause he was used to its thick darkness, and could see a little farther through it. A plan of life grew slowly up within him as he sat in the shadow, and these male and female scoundrels discussed his deeds and speculated on his identity and his whereabouts, and the chances of his detection. He was bound to elude justice still, if that were possible. It was his clear duty not to denounce himself;

and it was just as clearly his duty to live till God should call him, and to make such poor atonement as lay in him to make. As he sat thinking of these things, a voice broke harshly on his ear.

'It's a curious case—a very curious case, ladies and gentlemen. Notice two or three things about it. The police found the purse, evidently thrown away by the thief. That makes it clear that the man had changed his mind, and repented of the robbery. Next day, a trifle over the amount taken by the thief is sent to the dead man's house, with a message to the effect that the man who borrowed it had sent it back again. That proves two things—first, that the man knew the amount of money in the purse he stole, and next that he didn't believe he had killed the man he stole it from. It proves another thing. It proves that the thief had money. Then you'll ask me, why did he turn footpad? Doesn't it stand to reason that he was pushed for money—that he was afraid he wouldn't get it in time—that he found out somehow that this man had money about him —that he knocked him down, and took it finding a chance to do it in a lonely place like

Spaniard's Lane—that he repented directly he'd done it, and threw the purse away—that he got his own money and some to spare next day, and sent the amount stolen back to the owner, and that he never knew the man was dead till he saw it in the paper, most likely? Doesn't that stand to reason, ladies and gentlemen?'

'Faix, said the Irishwoman, 'it's you for the long head, anyway, darlin'. There was the fine lawyer spoiled when you was made.'

The listener in the shadow caught his breath. Did these things lie so plainly on the surface of the story, that any one who chose might find them there, or did the man who so closely hit the truth know more than he professed?

'The lawyer wasn't spoiled when I was made, my dear,' said the harsh voice, with a chuckling laugh. 'He was spoiled five-and-thirty years later.'

'Then you wor a lawyer?' said the Irish tramp.

'Yes,' said the man in the sack, for it was he who spoke; 'I was a lawyer, and a pretty good lawyer, too, till twelve men entered into

a conspiracy against me, and blackened my character.'

'What was you tried for?' asked the one-armed soldier, piercing this transparent metaphor.

'Having a short memory,' said the reprobate in the sack. 'But I studied at Botany Bay, ladies and gentlemen, and improved it, and I never forget anything now.

Was there a threat in that? thought the listener in the shadow. Did the man know anything? *Could* he know anything? He turned slowly round, and looked across the light to where the ugly old reprobate sat sucking his pipe in the opposite corner. Was it only by chance that the old man's eyes were fixed upon him with so keen a look? Frank received the gaze calmly, or with outer calmness, and closing his eyes, sank back into his old attitude. He had been robbed the night before, not improbably by this man, and it might be that the tramp himself feared suspicion, and wished to disarm it by effrontery.

'You don't seem to know me again, companion,' said the harsh voice. 'We chummed together last night at Bilston.' Frank bent his head a little lower, and returned no answer.

'There's a comrade for you!' the tramp went on. 'Won't own his friend because he wears a peculiar coat.'

Nobody took verbal notice of the appeal, but one or two turned lazily and looked in the direction indicated by the old man's outstretched finger, and then turned lazily back again. When the time came for bed, it fell again to Frank's miserable lot to lie in the same room with this intrusive acquaintance, whom he feared. The wretched night wore itself away, and with the first dawn of light the wanderer rose and stole softly from the room. The outer door was fastened by a bolt, which he drew back carefully, yet with now and then a rusty shriek, and the door itself scratched noisily upon the brick floor. He drew it after him, and came upon the street. He heard the voice of the man he had feared to awake above him. Looking up involuntarily, he saw the silk hat and the tramp's face below it projecting through the window.

'You're leaving early, companion,' said the tramp. 'Wait a bit and I'll join you.'

Frank turned without an answer and walked on, sickening. But his limbs were weak and stiff, and he travelled so slowly

that before he had gone a hundred yards, his aversion came panting up beside him and jogged on grotesquely at his side.

'You can see,' said Frank, 'that I wish to avoid you. Why do you follow me?'

'My dear young friend,' returned the tramp, pantingly, 'I'm one of the tenderest creatures in the world—one of the most impressionable, and I've taken a fancy to you.'

Frank put himself to his best speed; but the other kept pace with him. They walked on until they were clear of the town, and the leader without knowing it struck on the Warwick road. The tramp's pursuit of him strengthened the hapless young artist's fear into certainty; and when they had gone in silence for more than an hour after quitting the town, he turned upon his follower.

'You shall dog my steps no longer,' he exclaimed.

'No?' said the tramp, leering at him. 'Why not?' His dirty features creased themselves into a laugh. 'Who's to prevent me from going where I please?'

'You have some reason,' said Frank with a deathly sickness at his heart, 'for dogging me in this way. What is it?'

'I'm pleased with your society,' the tramp answered with a horrible smile. 'It does me good to think that I'm mixing with people of my own rank again.—Well, if that isn't the true reason, shall I try another? Don't be impatient, my dear young friend. Will you walk on again? Then, I'll come with you. Here's the other reason. I'm a sort of modern Autolycus, you must know—a picker-up of unconsidered trifles. Ah! It's quite refreshing to be able to refer to these poetic memories, and to know that you're in the society of one who understands them. Well you know, my young friend, I take an interest in you, and I've picked up a trifle or two about you.'

Frank stopped short again and looked at him. He could not have spoken a word then for life's sake.

'You're rather a heavy sleeper,' the tramp went on, his ugly features creasing themselves into a laugh once more, 'and I'm a light one. A friend of mine stayed in the same room with us the night before last—a gentleman whose chief mental characteristic is a passionate curiosity. He *will* know things. He won't allow himself to remain in the dark.

Now, that's quite a commendable characteristic, quite a commendable characteristic, my dear young friend.—Where was I? Oh yes! My curious friend was anxious to know what you had in your pockets. I had mentioned to him —I confess it freely—I had mentioned to him that I had seen you receive change for a sovereign, and he felt quite a burning longing to know what you had in your pockets. So he looked. And I believe, if my memory serves me right, that he found a purse there, and I think—mind I'm not sure, but I *think* that he forgot to put it back again. He found some things there besides, some trinkets—rings I think they were. And they looked valuable. My friend put *them* back again, and remarked to me—and that's why I remember them so clearly—that they weren't safe things for a poor man to have about him, because they looked suspicious.'

There the rascal paused, and laughed once more. Frank could not have answered for his life, and so stood there, wordless, with a beating heart.

'Now,' the tramp went on, 'when a gentleman with hands like those—I'm sure the rings would have fitted them—is going about the

country in your peculiar way, and when he has money enough for decent clothes and decent lodgings, and when he never says a word to the police about being robbed—for that's the word, you know—it seems to stand to reason that he has very particular grounds indeed for keeping quiet, and for not mingling in that gay circle of which he may have been an ornament. I hope I'm putting it pleasantly, and not in a way to wound your feelings. I wouldn't do that for the world, I do assure you.'

'And now,' Frank answered, drawing himself together by a supreme effort. 'What does all this lead to?'

'Lead to?' cried the tramp. 'Why, to this pleasant little explanation, and the formation of a partnership. I'm sure I shouldn't be surprised if you turned out quite generous. I do assure you that I should regard without a shadow of amazement an offer on on your part to share the proceeds of those nice rings. I believe you're going to make me the offer now?'

'And so, having robbed me already,' Frank answered, striving to speak steadily and to belie his fears, 'you wish to rob me again.'

'*I* rob?' said the tramp. 'What an erroneous estimate of my character you must have formed to be sure! Rob you? Nothing of the sort, my dear young friend. I offer silence. Silence is golden, my young companion, and I offer silence, in return for a share of the proceeds of those nice rings.'

'Silence about what?' asked Frank, once more breaking the bond of fear which held him like a nightmare.

'You don't know,' said the tramp, with the old repulsive laugh, 'what a knack I have of putting two and two together, and making four of 'em. Perhaps you heard me put two and two together last night about that curious affair in Spaniard's Lane. You may have noticed the compliment the Irish lady was good enough to make me. Well, my young friend, it may be worth your while—I don't say it is, mind—but it may be—to ask me not to put two and two together about *you*.'

Were there only vague suspicions in the man's mind, or was the allusion to Spaniard's Lane renewed of set purpose? Frank, fighting down the fears which beset him, tried to face that dreadful question calmly. After

what seemed a long pause, he said, looking straight into the tramp's evil eyes, 'I am not the first broken gentleman the world has seen, by many. If there be anything suspicious in my being here, and I suppose there is, I cannot help it, and I do not greatly care to help it. I shall not try to purchase your silence or your complicity, because I know that even if your silence were worth buying, you would only pretend to sell it, and would sell me afterwards if you could. Now, for the last time, choose your road, and let me choose mine.'

'You dream out loud,' said the tramp, with the same unchanging ugly smile. 'And when my friend looked at your pockets—an unwarrantable liberty, no doubt, but prompted by a laudable thirst for knowledge, I do assure you—he found a pocket-book with a name and an address in it. A swell address it was, too, my dear. Perhaps they'd pay more there than anybody else would.'

'Take your own course,' said Frank, thinking the bold way the best. 'Suspect what you please, do what you please; but choose your way now, and let me choose the other.'

'If Maud should know! If Maud should hear of it!'

When the tramp spoke those words, Frank staggered as though a blow had struck him, and a pallor like that of a corpse overspread his face. A second later, moved by a fiery impulse, he advanced upon his torturer, who leaped backwards with more agility than might have been expected of him, and cried out,—'Hands off, or take care of yourself!' Frank stood still, shuddered, sickened, and fell. His hardships, and his illness, and the tempestuous agitation of his mind had so dragged him down that he swooned like a girl, and lay there dead white on the miry road. The tramp bent down over him.

'That little quotation from his dreams appears to have hit the young gentleman hard,' said he, plunging a hand into one of Frank's pockets. 'You're as good as an income to me, my dear young friend, I do assure you.'

'Whoa!' shouted a coarse voice, which sounded almost in the ruffian's ear. Behind the hedge came a ploughman with his team. Scattering a few silver coins in his haste upon the ground, the tramp made off as fast as his

legs could carry him townwards. When he found that he was not pursued, he paused, and looking at his haul, discovered that he had something less than a pound's worth of silver. Thereupon he stood still, and cursed his luck. Half-an-hour later, a farm-labourer passed Frank lying on the road, and being a soul with an eye to the main chance, and seeing the scattered silver, he picked it up, and sped with eager feet and fearful heart down the road, leaving the man helpless in his swoon behind him. When this amiable person passed the tramp, that scoundrel was still blaspheming over his small gains. 'I know he pawned 'em,' whined the tramp, 'because he walked into My Uncle's straight under my nose. And just when Providence led him afterwards into the very crib I was staying in, and when I had him in a dead-faint under my fingers, that clumsy idiot of a yokel comes and frightens me away. Well, well, well. The cup and the lip—the cup and the lip. I never *did* have luck like other people. It was well played, and I frightened him about the address. I wish I'd seen it, but I hadn't time. I wonder what he'd been up to? It might have been the Spaniard's

Lane business after all, though he never gave a sign when I mentioned it.'

The next man who passed poor Frank as he lay upon the highway was a gentleman-farmer on horseback, in a hurry to get to town. He acquitted himself of duty's call by riding carefully on one side, and objurgating the senseless man for a drunken scoundrel. Then came a carter, with less brains perhaps, but more heart; and he, taking the helpless figure in his arms, set it in a comfortable posture on the bank at the side of the road, and having twice or thrice sniffed at the patient's breath, took to slapping the slender soft hands with his own horny digits until the fainting man awoke, looked dimly round him, and staggering to his feet, went blindly on.

'Hillyho, mate!' called the carter; 'you bain't fit to walk. Get into my cyart, an' have a lift.' Frank paused. He was yet half unconscious. The carter helped him into the rough vehicle, and spread sacks for him to lie on, and then taking his seat upon the shaft, jogged on without inquiry or observation. In an hour's time, Frank sat up and looked about him, at the broad white road, and the green fields, and the bare trees and hedges. The

carter turned round upon his shaft: 'D'ye feel better, mate?'

'A great deal better, thank you,' Frank replied. 'I will get down here.'

'Why?' asked the carter. 'Where be you goin'?'

He had walked quite blindly for the last two days, and was altogether ignorant of the topography of the country. He could not tell for the moment whether he was going east, west, north, or south, and the question confused him. He could only say again, 'I will get down here, thank you.'

'D'ye belong anywheer about here, mate?' asked the carter. How was he to know that his questions were embarrassing, and that embarrassment meant torture? His passenger was silent; and the carter was a little offended at this, and whipping up his horse, started a droning tune. Wishing to conciliate the man, Frank asked him how far he was going.

'As fur as Warwick,' the carter answered. 'How fur be you goin'?'

'I am going on to Warwick,' Frank answered. He passed now into a condition of sheer vacuity. He was quite purposeless, and in some sort at rest. There was a cloud about

him, and he knew that he was miserable, but he had but little bodily or mental pain, and he cared for nothing. The carter had a great tin bottle of cold tea with him, and a plentiful supply of bread and meat. He shared these with his passenger, and the two sat in the cart together eating and drinking as the slow horse plodded on. When the meal was over, the cart stopped before a wayside public-house, and the horse had a feed and the carter a drink, for which Frank paid. Then they plodded on again until they reached Warwick, after night-fall. At the entrance to the town, Frank descended and proffered money to the carter, who at first refused it, and finally took it, and having gravely spat upon it and pouched it, lumbered off in the darkness. It suited the wayfarer to be lonely, and he wandered heavily about the streets, looking for a house in which to pass the night. He saw no announcement of lodgings anywhere. The night was late, and most of the houses were in darkness; and caring little, he wandered through the town and out of it. The skies were clear, and the moon was nearly at the full. The words came into his mind as if somebody had whispered them—Purposeless, hopeless, lost.

CHAPTER X.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

'Shall we make a compact to be always friends.'

ONE fine day in summer, Sally took me by the hand, and walked with me down the avenue, through the great gates and into the village. The place was for the most part new, like the Hall of which it was a sort of appanage and outgrowth; but there were one or two very old houses in it, stone-built and sturdy, with red-tiled roofs which set off bravely the green of the surrounding trees. Before one of these, mellow with lichen, my companion stopped, and with many nods and smiles, and some blushes, drew out a big key from her pocket, opened the door, and entered. We came first upon a sort of parlour, where a tall and rigid clothes-press, reaching nearly to the ceiling, mounted guard over the inferior fur-

niture. There was a brilliant carpet, the pattern of which was made up of a set of bouquets in vases, of so enormous a size, that four of them covered the floor. There were two lithographed German prints upon the walls, showing a number of absurdly wooden children at their lessons and at play. Two diamonded windows let light upon this apartment, and at each hung a pair of imitation lace curtains. I have no doubt that to Sally's eyes the room seemed palatial. I know for my own part, although I was but indifferently impressed with it at first, that when Sally turned round upon me beaming, and said, 'This is my 'ome, my precious,' I was at once unfeignedly charmed with it.

When we came to the back-room, Sally hung purposely behind, to see what impression it made upon me. It came upon me almost with a shock, for I seemed to have walked at one childish step clean out of the west-country village into the old cottage kitchen with which my most intimate childish memories were associated. From the eight-day clock, whose fatuous and familiar face again stared out upon me, to the black-leaded cast-iron lion and unicorn who pranced at each other across

the intervening space of mantel-shelf, everything was there as I remembered it. The room lent itself to the deception; the clock was once more accommodated with a well to stand in, and down to the minutest detail the resemblance to the old place seemed complete. Sally stood enjoying my surprise, and when I turned round upon her, she absolutely frisked for joy, and brought both hands together. 'You'll come here sometimes, won't you, Johnny,' said the good soul, with both arms round me as she knelt upon the floor, 'and play at being poor again?' I promised heartily I would; and Sally having kissed me, led me out at the back-door, and showed me a new-built shed, in which was a carpenter's bench with one or two vices attached to it, and an instrument which I had not seen the like of before, beside it. This, Sally told me, was a lathe. Bob, she said, had turned to be a turner, and now, she added, with the only attempt at a joke I ever heard from her, he was a Turner by name and a Turner by nature. Emboldened by the success of this experiment, Sally amplified the jest, remarking that she was going to turn and be a Turner, likewise; after which she blushed intensely, and led me

indoors again. We sat down in the kitchen; and she went off into a series of spasmodic reminiscences of our old life, beginning each with a burst of, 'And oh! don't you remember, Johnny?' Her good heart—and I have met with many friendships and affections in my time, but none more tender or more faithful—was filled with the thought of those old days; and when she told me how forlorn and friendless I had been at my father's death, and how little hope there seemed for me, she was moved to tears by the remembrance; and I cried for company. Then we registered a solemn promise that if ever I were in trouble, I should come to my old friend. 'For,' said Sally, 'it ain't money, and it ain't rich friends, as'll save you from trouble, my poor lamb. But a loving 'art'll make it light, Johnny; and come it weal or come it woe, you'll find no change in me, dear.'

Though Bob had himself expressly stipulated that he and Sally should wait to see what success his venture on new ground achieved, he had no sooner established himself than he gave notice to the clergyman of the parish to put up the banns. I heard them 'cried,' as Sally phrased it, on three

successive Sundays—Robert Turner, bachelor, and Sarah Troman, spinster—the definitions of their several estates sounding quite respectful on the parson's part, I felt. Bob, I discovered, was experimenting on a mother-in-law before matrimony, inasmuch as both his own mother and Sally's had taken up their abode in the cottage. I discovered also that Bob regarded his own mother as a sufficient antidote against Sally's; and that Sally had the same sort of theory with regard to the Dowager Troman's restraining influence over the Dowager Turner. Whether the theory were a sound one on both sides, and can be so recommended to the multitude, I cannot venture to say; but I know that they all four dwelt together in great peace and contentment. The two old ladies began by-and-by to live in a state of continual soapsuds; for the washing from the Hall fell to their share; and Bob with his own hands erected a wooden wash-house, and even built up the brick-work for the boiler.

Up to the time of Sally's marriage, my goings-out and comings-in had been pretty strictly regulated; but now an enormous flunkey being deputed to my service, I sum-

moned that gorgeous menial when I would—apart from my hours for lessons—and was by him accompanied to my old nurse's cottage, to the great admiration of the whole village. I was not at that time of a self-assertive turn; and since my association with the gorgeous menial inevitably made a public show of me, and was provocative of public comment, I would willingly have dispensed with his society. I was always happy to escape from the shadow of his grandeur into the quiet of Sally's kitchen or Bob's workshop. Under Bob's tuition I became a tolerable carpenter, and a book-shelf of my sole manufacture hangs in his cottage to this day.

While these halcyon times sped smoothly on, the war in the Crimea was raging, and news of victory or defeat reached us now and again. When I went to visit Sally, my attendant used to carry yesterday's *Times* with him; and I read to Bob the impressive letters of that father of special correspondents who chronicled the war for Jupiter Tonans. Sometimes letters came from Uncle Ben's son 'the Lieutenant,' the third announcing that he had won his troop; but these con-

tained sparse news of the war, though he took a gallant part in it. Once or twice, a letter came to Maud from Cousin Will; and although she read these in private, and never spoke of them, it was plainly to be seen that they discouraged and disheartened her. The allied troops had settled down before Sevastopol; and I had just returned from a visit to the village, when I saw Cousin Will alighting from his horse at the Hall door! I had been reading aloud the first description of the trenches, and had so clearly in my own mind pictured Cousin Will there, that I was quite amazed to see him. He shook hands with me, and patted me on the shoulder in his old pleasant way; but he looked sad and tired. He was very deeply tanned, and had grown a rich brown beard, which became him handsomely. I learned afterwards that the only news he brought related to an unavailing search, and that he had returned in consequence of an alarming message about his father. Mr. Fairholt was well again, and was desirous that Will should return and carry on the inquiry he had begun. I knew at the time that the search had led to nothing, for I could read that in

Maud's eyes. Will announced that his stay would last a week only; but on the day before that on which he should have started, he came, not to say farewell, but to bring a letter he had just received from his friend Mr. Hastings. I have that letter in my possession now, and I transcribe it here. It bore date 'Camp before Sevastopol,' and ran thus :—

'My dear Will,—The worst has happened. Forgive this cruel abruptness, but I feel it best to tell you all at once. Poor Frank has met a soldier's death, and whatever trouble drove him from you, is over now. He was in Findlay's company in the —nd. I had news of him the night before the assault on the fourth, but I could not possibly get away to see him. When I went down after the fight, he was missing, and only to-day he was buried. Everybody speaks highly of him. I know you would not like to think of him as being buried with a hundred others, so I took out some of my men and ordered them to make a grave behind the last parallel. The place shall be marked by an inscription, and railings are now being set about it. God com-

fort you, old friend. I have not the heart to write more just now.—Yours always,

'ARTHUR HASTINGS.'

By what means Captain Hastings believed himself to have identified the dead man as Frank Fairholt, I never knew. But I know now that all the tender offices he performed were done for a stranger. That the stranger was at least a gentleman seems to have been amply proved by the testimony of officers and men. But it is a common thing that family sorrows should have that end in time of war, and many an Englishman well-born and gently nurtured fought in a private's uniform in that campaign, and met an unchronicled death, and lies in an unknown grave there. They wore no mourning at Island Hall. Will went out again to the Crimea, this time with a commission. He and his father and Maud accepted Hastings' statement as the end of hope. The matter was never talked about, and the country-people, who had almost forgotten to gossip about Frank Fairholt's disappearance, did not hear of the supposed end of the tragedy. The true close of that tragic story was deferred for many years; but it has always seemed to

me a most merciful and happy thing that they who loved him believed him to be dead. There were but a few who shared in that belief who lived to know that it was false. But I am mixing new memories and old.

Uncle Ben sent for me one day, and told me that it was time I should go to school; and I begged him to send me to that to which Gascoigne had been removed. He promised to think it over; and my wish was granted. I met my friend once more, and was just as happy with him as I had ever been. If I have seemed to leave him for a long space in this chronicle, it is not because he was out of my heart, but because he was out of my life for the time. I had written a letter to say that I was coming, and he received me as kindly and as gladly as I could have hoped. Was I ever happier in my life than when he put his arm round my shoulders and said, 'Well, old Jack,' as we crossed the cricket-field together? I think not. He was all admirable; and looking back upon him as he was, I cannot wonder at my worship of him. He was studious and ambitious now, and worked hard; but there was nobody more popular in the

school than he. It was a large school; and there were great fellows in it with incipent beards, who drank British wines under the rose in their bedrooms, and gave and took the odds upon the Derby. Rightly or wrongly, fagging and the other devices for making life unbearable which flourish at many large schools, were strictly forbidden here; but there was a good deal of concealed bullying, as there always will be in assemblies of boys. From much of this, which would otherwise have fallen to my share, Gascoigne protected me; and in other matters his friendship made life smooth for me.

'Old Jack,' he said one day as we sat together under the shade of a big tree, 'what's your idea about friendship?'

I answered lightly and lazily—for it was a blazing day, and the air beyond the shadow of the tree took a wavy trembling motion in the heat—that I had no ideas about anything.

'I've been thinking, Old Jack,' said Gascoigne, laying a serious hand upon my shoulder, 'that it's quite an awful thing.'

'What's an awful thing?' I asked languidly.

'Friendship,' said Gascoigne, throwing himself full length upon the grass.

'Why?' I questioned languidly again.

'Because,' said Gascoigne, propping himself up on his elbow, and regarding me with great earnestness, 'it entails one of the greatest responsibilities in the world. Because two people who are friends make themselves responsible for each other. If I had a friend, and he went to the bad, and I met him in rags and poverty and disgrace, and if it ruined me to own him and help him, I should have to do it. If two fellows are really friends, nothing can come between them. And if one has any power or influence over the other, he doubles his responsibility. And apart from all those things, Old Jack, there's something very wonderful and sacred in real friendship which isn't easy to talk about.'

'But we are friends,' I said; though it seemed to me a most presumptuous thing a moment later.

'Well, you see, Old Jack,' said Gascoigne biting at a flower-stalk he held, 'we are friends; but who can tell where we shall be in twenty years' time? We shall grow up; and you will go one way, and I shall go another.'

I can remember now how those words chilled and disheartened me, and what a

shadow they seemed to cast upon the prospect of my life. He was so much older and wiser and cleverer than I; and I had come to have so implicit a faith in him, that anything he might say had greater weight than if anybody else had spoken it. But I rebelled against this fiat altogether; and I determined that whatever change might overshadow his regard for me, mine for him would always be as warm and bright as then. There was a coldness which froze any response in me at the time in the calm way in which he spoke of the possible breach in our knowledge of each other and our care for each other; and I could make no answer. And it seemed altogether too bold and impudent a thing to beg the friendship which had been hitherto so freely given by one so much above me.

He must have seen how my countenance clouded, for he laid a hand upon me and said smilingly, 'Never mind, Old Jack. Perhaps I am playing at Cassandra for nothing. Have you come across Cassandra yet? She was a lady whose business it was to foretell disagreeable things. Her sayings used to come true; and mine won't, most likely. Shall we make a compact to be always friends?'

As I recall the tones in which he spoke, I seem to read a certain mixture of cynicism with the light, kindly patronage of his voice and manner. I can but poorly express the fancy, but there was something there which made me feel that he put the question in a sort of mockery of my discomfiture, and yet that he meant it not unkindly. Shall I say rather that he spoke the words to soothe me, and had at the same time within himself a gay and careless disbelief in the compact he offered? No such disbelief clouded my mind for a second.

'Will you promise, Gascoigne?' I asked him eagerly.

He laughed and brought his hand into mine with a swing. 'Yes,' he said; 'it's a bargain.' But his face grew serious a moment later, and a shadow seemed to fall upon us both.

There was a certain stiffly-built, bullet-headed youth in the school, who was known as Gregory minor. He was very fair by nature; but his skin looked quite yellow at this time by reason of the freckles with which it was almost covered. He was a youth of considerable humour, and the world is by this time beginning to be persuaded that Gregory minor

—though the world knows him under another name—can write a comedy. He was a dull dog at his lessons; but though he nearly always went under the weight of added impositions, he was a general favourite with the masters as well as with the boys. Above all things he was fertile in nicknames, and he had conferred upon Gascoigne the cognomen 'Miss Aureole,' in recognition of the golden brightness of his plentiful hair. There was in the near neighbourhood of the school, as there used to be in that of the Royal Castle at Elsinore, if we may trust to the statement of the Queen of Denmark, a spot where a gnarled willow grew aslant a brook. This willow had been denuded of its branches; and I, being at that time deep in the history of Don Quixote de la Mancha, and having discovered that the crown of the sloping tree made a comfortable seat, used to go and sit there as often as I could, under the shade of a glorious old elm, and read. Against this habit of mine, which I count now as being one of the pleasantest I ever contracted, a great number of my schoolfellows arose in protest. I never knew why, and—unless it be that school-boys, like men, resist and resent anything approaching to

eccentricity, especially when it takes shape in withdrawal or self-banishment—I cannot tell now. But I found before long that my place of retirement had become perhaps the most public spot in the neighbourhood, and that steal as quietly as I would to my retreat, I was always chivied from it without mercy, by a roaring crowd of my co-equals. Gascoigne came once by accident that way, and dispersed the intruding association; but they came back with an elder faction added, and dispossessed us both. In memory of this lofty perch, Gregory minor had dubbed me St. Simeon of the Pillar, and this being brought down in the first instance to Stylites, came afterwards but very speedily to Sty-lights; but later on, to Sty or Lights indifferently; so that before I left the school, but was surrounded by a new generation, the names meant nothing, and were but maimed survivals of an olden time, like many other names which the teeth of the Old Man with the Scythe have mauled for the bewilderment of learned philologists. In like manner, Gascoigne's nickname became first Miss Aury—an obvivous contraction—and then Missouri—a palpable corruption—so that a legend got somehow abroad that he came from

the banks of that mighty river, and that his grandfather or great grandfather had taken the stream, or done something with it in the time of the War of Independence. Upon Gregory minor, in disdainful return, Gascoigne had set the name of Æsop's Frog, in part allusion to a supposed bumptiousness of manner, and in part allusion to the froglike freckles with which Gregory minor's hands and face were marked. This designation receiving general approval, and becoming current, was abbreviated into Æsop, and stayed there.

One day, whilst the second eleven of our school were engaged in a match with an eleven from a private school in the neighbourhood, Gascoigne strolled towards me under the beeches which lined the ground on the eastern side. From where I lay, I had a very good view of the game. My hero had played an innings of three-and-twenty, and I was satisfied. He came to me now, and threw himself on the turf beside me; and we watched the match together. The afternoon was already growing into evening, and facing us a city of cloud was built up in the sky. I do not remember to have seen a more wonderful sunset. The interest in the match was over,

for the opposing team were hopelessly beaten; and when Gascoigne stretched out his hand and called out, 'Look here, Old Jack!' I forgot everything else, and watched the skyey palaces as the soft hand of the wind built them into marvellous forms, and the dying sun baptised them with his light, and made them glorious with all imaginable splendours of colour.

Gascoigne, lying beside me with his eyes upon the sunset, began to repeat verses to himself, and gradually growing clearer in utterance as he became more absorbed and unconscious, broke out with this:—

'The sun goes down to his rest
Through the high-arched western gate,
And crowds of servants, gorgeously dressed,
Marshal him thither in state;
And curtains of amber and ruby
Loop over him fold on fold,
And far-off eyes of silver peep
Through gates of dusky gold.

'Softly fades the evening glow,
Evening breezes whisper low,
Thoughts, like shadows, come and go.'

The lines seemed to me then, whatever I may think of them now, completely beautiful.

'Who wrote that, Gascoigne?' I asked, turning upon him eagerly.

'I did,' he answered, still looking at the sunset like one who saw beyond it.

The voice of Gregory minor broke upon us from behind the nearest tree. 'The young woman,' said Æsop's Frog, 'has took to poetry.'

I do not remember having felt more disgusted in my time at any incongruity of speech than I felt then. There had been a feud for many months, as I knew, though I had seen but little of it, between Gascoigne and Æsop, and I was not surprised, but only a little frightened, when my friend sprang to his feet and struck the satirist. A blow was regarded as a challenge to a fight, by etiquette, apart from natural instinct.

'All right,' said Æsop, accepting the situation, and marched away calmly with his hat at the back of his head, Gascoigne following, and I bringing up the rear in much agitation. The intending combatants paused behind a haystack, having made their way through a gap in the hedge into another field. 'Will this do?' asked Æsop. Gascoigne nodded, and the two, having taken off their jackets

and waistcoats, shook hands, and stood up before each other, and the fight began. It went all in Gascoigne's favour at the beginning, for he was the more active, and the more scientific, but after a time the sturdy strength of Gregory minor began to tell. Old Æsop cared nothing for his punishment, and I began to see that the victory must go with him, when things reached a sudden crisis. The combatants came to a hug, and after a brief wrestle in which Gascoigne's science was nowhere when compared with the other's stolid resistance, they came down heavily together, and Gregory minor was on top.

'Is that enough?' asked Old Æsop, with a boy's brutal disregard of the courtesies of war.

'No,' said Gascoigne. But he had to sit down again after scrambling to his feet, and in the next round he went down almost without the power to make a struggle.

'That's enough, I think,' said Old Æsop with a smile, which a swollen lip and discoloured eye made somewhat grim. Gascoigne returned no answer this time, and his late opponent approached him, tendering his hand. 'We've had it out now, and we both wanted

to have it out, you know, and I don't mind saying that I thought those verses thundering good uns, old fellow.' Gascoigne took his hand a little unwillingly. 'Look here, you know,' Old Æsop added, 'a joke's only a joke, after all, and *I* don't see that life 'd be worth much if a man couldn't grin at something.' So saying, he put on his waistcoat and coat, and went calmly back again, leaving me disconsolately agaze at Gascoigne.

CHAPTER XI.

HISTORY.

'There is a spark of goodness here.'

ON a day in spring, when the birds seemed mad with jollity, a little child came singing down a country lane. She carried a basket on her arm, and in one hand she jingled together some eight or ten copper pieces. Two or three fleecy clouds set off the perfect blue of the sky; a light wind, full of the fresh scent of trees and flowers and country earth, fanned the child's face; and no bird in the hedges or the trees about her sang a blither song than hers. As she danced down the lane, there appeared in the highway before her the figure of a diminutive man in a coat made of an old sack, and corduroy trousers much too large for him. He had a spiky white beard and moustache, and he wore a silk hat battered

out of all shape, and foul with dirt. The little maid skipped gaily on, rattling her coppers, and the diminutive man paused to regard her. He heard the jingle of the money in her hand, and looked cautiously up and down the road.

'Where are you going, my little dear?' he said as she approached him.

The bits of blue sky which shone in the damsel's eyes clouded, and she stopped with a look of affright. The little man shuffled up to her, and with a sudden cruel grip caught the child by the wrist, and gave it a sharp wrench. She screamed faintly, and dropped both her money and her basket. The little man picked them up, and looking about him with an air of indecision for a moment, flung the basket over the nearest hedge, then put the coppers into his pocket, shook his fist at the child, grinned, and walked away. The little maiden only a minute before so glad and fearless, sat down and wept bitterly. Home was her only refuge, and she trembled to go home, and she was afraid to stay in the lane, which now seemed so dangerous and lonely. So you see she had nothing left but to sit there and cry broken-heartedly.

Perhaps half-an-hour later, came that way

a man with deep sunken black eyes and a sallow face half-hidden in a great black beard laced with grey. His black hair hung about his face and neck, and there were many white hairs intermingled with it. He was dressed in broken garments, and his boots scarce clung to his feet. As he walked on slowly with downcast eyes, the noise of the child's weeping struck his ear, and he looked about in a slow, dazed, inquiring way, as if the sound hurt him. Following the child's cry, he turned into the lane, and there saw the little girl lying on a grassy hillock with her face in her hands. He knelt down beside her and spoke soothingly. 'What is it? Poor little woman. What is it?'

The child looked up at him with her large blue eyes quite overbrimmed with tears. She could not stop crying all at once. Her little breast heaved, and her open lips quivered, and the blue eyes overflowed; but she stretched her arms out to the ragged tramp, as if she trusted him; and he, sitting on the hillock, took her on his knee, and put one arm about her neck, and petted and soothed her until she could speak. Then with many sobs, she told her story; and the tramp, having heard

her to the end, first scrambled through the hedge and restored her basket; and then showing her a shilling, asked her if that was as much as had been stolen from her. She could not tell; but he bade her run to complete her errand, and away she went with her fears banished and her trouble over. The tramp looked after her for a minute before he resumed his walk. He had parted with his last coin, and now for the first time in his life was penniless. Yet he cared little for that as he went upon his way. He had nothing to walk for and nowhere to go, but he walked with a dogged, downcast perseverance, which to the eye of any one who had troubled to observe him would have seemed to indicate a purpose. Once or twice men garbed like himself passed him on the way and flung him a rough salutation, but he returned no answer. The sun went down and the air began to be chilly, and he walked on shivering. The darkening road stretched out before him lonely and sad in the twilight. He leaned over a gate and peered into the fields; then climbed the gate, and sauntered to a hay-stack, beside which some twenty or thirty bundles of straw had been thrown down. He nestled under the lee of

the stack, and drew the great bundles of straw over him, and lay there dry and snug until a refreshing warmth came over him, and he fell asleep. He was up before dawn, for fear of discovery, and plodding along the road again in the cold and darkness. He grew dolefully hungry; but at that season of the year the fields were bare, and there was no chance for a penniless man to pick up anything. He walked all day, and housed himself at night in a barn to which he found a chance entrance. Next day saw him again upon the road, travelling more slowly and with greater effort, but still bent nowhere, and utterly without a purpose, though his dogged perseverance might have made it seem to one who watched him that he was walking away from death to life. That night he found another sheltering hay-stack, out of which he dragged enough hay to make room for his body. He lay down there, and pulled the surplus hay over him; and the racking of his rheumatic limbs and the pangs of an empty stomach kept him awake all night. Next day he sighted London, and went on with wearier and ever wearier feet in the profitless race against his own shadow, refusing at every step to know that he could go no farther.

In one of the outlying districts of London, an enterprising tradesman had lined the back of the window in which he displayed his goods with gorgeously panelled mirrors. The tramp came by in the sunshine and looked at the window. The tradesman stood at his own door and surveyed the sunlit street and the striped shop-blinds, and looked kindly on a thirsty dog which went to the waterman's bucket opposite. But observing that the human Pariah paused before his window, the tradesman turned and eyed him with suspicion. For his part, the tramp paused in perfect vacuity of mind, and in a mood so dreamy and unobservant, that he took the reflected image of himself for the actual solid body of some person in the shop. And being, as we have seen already, of a tender heart, he felt a dim pity stir within him at the sight of that melancholy spectacle. Stained with travel, ragged, bent, miserably shod, the creature standing there in the shop seemed deserving of pity. But as the tramp outside raised his head and moved his hand, an answering motion arrested his regard, and he saw in a second the trick his mind and eyes had played him. More than the third part of a year had

gone by since he had consciously beheld the similitude of himself in a glass, and then he had seen a figure so different from this that his momentary failure to recognise himself need scarcely be regarded with surprise. He had been gay, and well dressed, and young, and splendidly handsome five months ago; and now this human scarecrow, who looked so hungrily and mournfully back at him from the gold-bound mirror—this was he—this bowed and bent and broken wretch, with the knotted black beard, grey-sprinkled, that flowed over his sunken breast, and the elf-locks with silver lines in them—himself and no other. And all this breaking in upon him, not as it is here set down, but like a lightning flash for swiftness and terribleness, he clasped his hands with one heart-rending groan, and his eyes grew so dim that the mirror and its reflection were blotted out of sight. At the sound of the groan the tradesman came off the door-step.

'What's the matter?'

The tramp turned his eyes upon him for one instant, and no more; and then with his hands drooping and clasped piteously before him, and his head bent downwards, he crawled on, dragging one foot after the other. The tradesman

took a step in pursuit, and sent a thumb and finger into his own waistcoat-pocket, whence they returned with a shilling between them; and the man half-benevolent, half-suspicious in mood, sending one glance after the retreating figure and another over the way, saw his rival tradesman regarding the tramp and him with a smile of satiric humour. That decided him. He followed the pitiable figure, slipped the shilling into the clasped hands, and shot himself shamefacedly back into his own shop again. The tramp faltered in his walk, and looked down upon the coin. He turned slowly; but he could see no one in the street, and he did not know from whom the gift had come. 'Humiliated?' the tramp said to himself questioningly. 'What right have I to feel humiliated?' But he had been proud, and this first offer of charity was very bitter to him. The bread he ate tasted of charity, hungry and empty as he was, and his swelling throat almost refused it.

The streets grew fuller and busier as he neared the City; and the lights springing up in the thin dusk, and the roll of carts and cabs, and the hoarse murmur of the distant streets were to him accustomed things, and full of

remembrances. What had moved him back to London? He could not tell. How should he live there? Where bestow himself? He could not tell. At length he found himself on London Bridge. Was there any temptation there? Ay! The dirty stream that ran oilily about the wharves and the greasy mud-banks, and stole in such filthy smoothness round the boats that lay moored in mid-stream—vaguely seen past the lights that rose in the thin spring dusk—called to him with a voice which found a ready answer. But though one half his soul clamoured with an eager cry for the rest that lay there, he shook his head in answer to that inward call and muttered: 'No. That is the basest end of all. Let the close come how and when it may, I will not seek it wilfully.' And in answer to that resolved murmur, rose an inward voice of longing, 'Let the end come soon;' and he muttered again, shaking his grey-sprinkled head, 'Amen to that. Let it come soon — let it come soon.' In this sorrowful case, still furtively munching the bitter bread of charity, and walking with his face bent downwards, shadowed by the drooping hat he wore and by his matted hair, he let his feet carry him whither they would.

He had wandered back to Holborn—for he had come up from the Western country—and the spring dusk had given way to night. A fretful wind teased itself with moanings until a close fine rain came down and stilled it. He was standing on the pavement facing Chancery Lane, when a private cab came by, rasping the kerbstone, and pulled up within three or four yards of him. 'Hold that there for me a minute, will you, mate?' said a whining voice in the tramp's ear; and before he knew it, he found himself holding a street-sweeper's broom. The owner of the broom had taken charge of the horse in the private cab; and the owner of the cab had swung himself out of it, and had gone with a hurried step along Warwick Court. The horse was restive, and insisted on going forward. The man who had assumed the charge of him was either unable to control, or unwilling to provoke the horse; and the cab was taken on slowly for perhaps a dozen yards, when it was brought to a stand behind a great wagon which blocked up that side of the way. Scarcely noting these things, the tramp stood at the kerbstone beneath a lamp-post, and directly at the head of the crossing, broom

in hand. 'Hi, sweeper!' said a comfortable voice; and the tramp saw a gloved hand extended towards him. Mechanically he put out his own hand, and a sixpenny-piece dropped into it from the gloved thumb and finger. Then, by some unaccountable accident, another and another and another charitably disposed soul came by; and although the tramp solicited nothing — perhaps partly because of that—copper pieces were dropped one by one into his hand, until, when the sweeper came back to claim his broom, his locum tenens had something like two shillings waiting for him.

'Why, whatever's this?' cried the sweeper in amazement, as the tramp put the sixpence and the little pile of coppers in the hand held out for the broom.

'It is yours,' said the tramp. 'It was given to me as I stood in your place, and was meant for you of course.'

'Oh, I say, mate,' cried the sweeper, 'you *are* a real true good sort; and what extraordinary luck you do have, to be sure.' The sweeper was a thin and faded man, dressed in somebody's cast-off suit of black broadcloth. Somebody's suit had been highly respectable

once upon a time, and was sunk into a deeper disgrace of seediness by reason of that old respectability. Some feeble attempt had been made to patch its looped and windowed raggedness; but little fragments of torn cloth shook at the man's shoulders and elbows and knees, and the skirts of his coat were vandyked with rags. The tramp had drooped his head again after one look at the sweeper, and had turned away; but the other followed him, and said, with a sort of reluctant haste, 'No; look here, mate; half of this ought to belong to you. No, sir; I'm poor, and I may have took to drink; but I've allays kep' my 'ed above water in the way of honesty, and I really couldn't,—Oh dear, no—I really couldn't.'

'Are you so scrupulous?' asked the tramp, turning round upon him wearily.

'Which, speakin' fair and honest, sir,' the sweeper answered, 'I really am, sir. I couldn't do it. Oh dear, no—I really couldn't do it.' He counted the money with his shaky fingers, and proffered half of it to the tramp, who only shook his head in answer.

'Oh, please!' said the sweeper in his whining voice. 'Don't think me indelicate or

over-pressin'; but I really couldn't keep it. I've seen better days, though I am a crossing-sweeper now; and I really couldn't demean myself to keep it.'

The tramp faced round again, and regarded him attentively. 'There is a spark of goodness here,' he thought; 'though not many would have suspected it. The man is thoroughly in earnest; and who am *I* of all men in the world that I should trample a good impulse down?' There came into his mind, as though a voice long silent had repeated them, these words, 'The bruised reed I will not break, the smoking flax I will not quench.' And that long-silent voice which whispered to his soul, seemed to lay a commandment on him. 'You will feel the want of this to-morrow,' said the tramp, as he held out his hand, and the sweeper placed the money, wet with the dismal rain, in his palm.

'Which we'll try to 'ope not, sir,' the other answered, and stopped before a flaring public-house. 'I haven't had a drop to-day,' he said, passing his hand across his mouth. 'Will you come in and take a share of half a quartern?'

'No!' said the tramp, with a little inward shudder.

'I beg your pardon,' said the other, in his querulous whining tones, 'for asking you; but I've seen better days myself; and anyone can see, sir, as you've not been used to this, sir, when you speak.'

'Can you tell me where I can get lodgings for the night?' asked the tramp, ignoring the dubious compliment. 'I am very poor. I had only tenpence when you shared with me.'

'If you'll only wait for me half a minute,' returned the sweeper, 'I'll take you to as good a place as there is. It isn't far, sir, and I'm going there myself.'

Receiving a nod of assent, he shambled into the gin-shop; and after a pause of a minute, came shambling out again, rubbing the back of his hand relishingly across his bristly lips. He led his companion along Holborn and into Oxford Street, and crossing the road with a brief injunction to the tramp to follow, went down a dark and noisome passage which led into a court-yard. At the far end of the court burned one oil-lamp, a feeble blur of light on the darkness. 'A good many of the steps is broken,' said the sweeper; 'and you'll have to feel along the wall, because the balusters has been broke up for firewood.' With this caution,

he preceded the stranger once more; and with now and then a warning word, made needful by the unsafeness and darkness of the way, led right to the top of the building. 'Wait there while I get a light,' said the tramp's guide speaking out of dense darkness. The tramp stood still, and heard him prowling cautiously about the floor, sliding his feet before him, as if afraid to set them firmly down. After a while the man struck a light, and found a candle; and then called the other to him. 'Step cautious,' he cried; 'you ain't used to the place, and there's a-many holes about.' The tramp not heeding this warning greatly, crossed the creaking floor, and in the dim light of the candle looked about the room in which he found himself. It was absolutely bare of furniture, and held nothing, so far as he could see, but three tea-chests, a heap of shavings, and some ragged sacks.

'I haven't got a lock to the room,' said the sweeper, still whining, as though he was beseeching charity; 'and when I'm in luck, and I've got a bit of firing, Mrs. Closky she keeps it for me in her place down-stairs. Sit down here, sir,' he continued, placing one of the tea-chests bottom upwards, 'and I'll see about a fire.'

Leaving his guest in the dark, he went down-stairs; and the tramp heard the murmur of conversation in the room below. He leaned his bearded chin upon his hands, and looked before him at the scenes which memory and fancy threw upon the black canvas of the night. They were many, and some of them were glad, but not one of them had any other lesson than despair for him. And suddenly, with no wish or conscious thought of his to bring them, the bridge and the river were before him, with dim blots of light upon the bridge against the thin spring dusk, and brightly scintillating sparks in the distance where the filthy stream went out of sight beneath the curtain of the gathering dark. And his whole soul yearned after the rest which lay within the bosom of the river, till he set his teeth and gripped his beard hard with both hands, and muttered to himself, 'Not that—not that. The coward's way. The meanest end of all. Not that, in God's name!' The slimy stream with its twinkling lights faded out of fancy's gaze; and the sweeper came stumbling up the broken stairs with the candle in his hand, and a lean sack thrown over his shoulder. Tumbling out a few handfuls of

coal and wood upon the floor, he knelt down at the grate and built up carefully the materials for a fire.

'Is this your own place?' asked the tramp, glad to turn his thoughts into any current but that in which they chose to run.

'Yes,' said the sweeper. 'It comes as cheap as Flight's Place; and I've been well to do in *my* time; and I can't abear the thought of mixing up along of them low riff-raff. Which that's what they are I know right well, sir—the very lowest of the very low.'

'What is Flight's Place?' the tramp asked.

'It's a thieves' kitchen—nothing better, sir,' answered the sweeper, fanning the fire with his hat, 'close by where I had the pleasure of meeting you, sir.'

'Ay?' said the tramp.

'Not as I'd say,' the sweeper continued, 'as Bolter's Rents was ezackly the kind of place as a man might care for to live in which had been well reared. But it's very quiet and retired-like, when you're at the top; and since the time when my poor wife died—my pardner in life, which she is dead and gorn, sir—there ain't been one creetur in this room but me. That is, not except Dr. Brand.'

'Dr. Brand, of Wimpole Street?'

'That's the same gentleman. Do you know him?' asked the sweeper.

'No,' said the tramp; 'but I have heard of him.'

'I daresay now, sir,' said the sweeper, leaving his place at the fire, which now burned brightly, and dragging one of the empty tea-chests before it, 'as you'd wonder what brought a gentleman like Dr. Brand to think of coming here, sir?'

'What brought him here?' the tramp returned, trying to feel some interest in the other's chatter, and to shut out the thoughts which beat at the door of his own mind.

'Why,' said the sweeper, spreading his hands before the blaze, and basking in it, but speaking always in the same whining tones, 'me and my poor pardner which is gorn, meaning my wife, sir, kep' a stationer's shop, with a licence for tobacco, close up against where Dr. Brand formerly used for to live when he was younger in practice. An' he used to deal with us, which he put a deal of money in my way, and brought a lot of custom. Which when I'd been in business nine or ten ear, sir, I'd saved a bit of money, and I

thought I'd venture for to enlarge the trade. And— Ah!' broke out the sweeper, shaking his head dismally at the fire, 'what a fool I were, for certain! I went to a man as had a office in Long Lane, which his name was Mister A. Tasker—'

A light shone suddenly in the tramp's dull eyes, and he lifted his head and looked in the speaker's face. His own countenance flushed crimson, and then paled again. He dropped his chin slowly upon his breast, and took his beard with both hands. The sweeper went on, noting nothing of his companion's agitation.

'And I borrowed more money off of him, and that was what broke *me* up, for he followed me that hard, and he did that persecute me. If you'll believe me, sir, I paid him four or five times over, which I shouldn't be surprised if I paid him six. And finally he came and sold me up.'

'Ay!' said the tramp. 'A blood-sucker.'

'Oh, you may well say that, sir,' cried his host, and maundered on again. But the tramp had fallen into a reverie, in which the other's words fell idly on his ear. He came out of his dream in time to hear the statement that *that*

was what the sweeper called a judgment, and he in answer nodded and said 'Ay!' But he had missed a story which might have been of interest to him had he heard it. It was no other than the tale of Mr. Tasker's fall, as related in court three days before by the counsel who appeared against Closky.

The sweeper saw something of the tramp's pre-occupation, and forbore to speak further, but, rising, began to arrange for him a bed of shavings, and to apportion the sacks which were to cover him. The self-absorbed man took no notice of his movements, and was indeed by this time unconscious of his presence. The host went downstairs again, taking the candle with him, and returning by-and-by with two rough and ragged blankets, threw one upon each of his improvised couches, and touched the tramp upon the shoulder, saying that he might go to bed when he would.

'What do you pay for this place?' asked the tramp, without turning round.

'I pay one-and-ninepence a week for it,' returned the sweeper. 'That's just threepence a night, you see. It comes as cheap as a lodging-house, and I have it to my own self.'

'Will you take me as a lodger for a week

if I share the payment with you?' asked the tramp, bending above the scanty embers of the fire. 'I am tired, and I must rest for a day or two.'

'You can stay here and welcome,' whined the sweeper. 'I don't want nothink from a man as is poor and honest, like myself.'

'I will not stay unless you let me pay,' said the tramp.

'Very well,' said the other. 'It ain't my fault if I take the money. I don't ask for none. Mind that, sir.'

'There's tenpence-halfpenny, and I am your lodger for a week. Is that agreed?'

'That's agreed,' said the sweeper, and the new lodger cast himself wearily down upon the sacks and shavings, and drew the tattered blanket over him. The sweeper as he arranged his own bed to his mind, offered two or three remarks to his companion, but receiving no answer, lay down, curled himself up in his blanket, and fell fast asleep.

And it was in this wise that Frank Fairholt became a lodger in Bolter's Rents.

CHAPTER XII.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

'There may come a time in your career when gentle dealing may seem out of place.'

I SUPPOSE it was a natural thing that Gascoigne and Gregory minor having had the quarrel out, should become fast friends. The consummation seemed at first a strange one; but I learned to welcome it. I had had so little companionship, and had become so solitary and sedentary in all my ways, that a rambling, adventurous, tree-climbing, bound-breaking young person like Æsop was the most valuable of all companions for me. I was afraid of him at the beginning; but I soon trusted him. He was as open as the day; and I believe a lie at any cost would have been morally impossible for him. His fancy ran riot with him often, and he launched

himself fearlessly on grotesquerie's wildest stream, and allowed it to take him whither it would; but he was unlike any other imaginative boy I have known in his stolid adherence to fact in all matters outside the domain of fancy. He was always in trouble, and he seemed to like it and to flourish on it, for he was always happy. He taught me to boat and swim and play cricket, and was willing to bowl at me for an hour together. Out of the companions, who crowded about me at school and college, Gascoigne and Æsop were the only two who accompanied me in after-life. I have no time to linger here upon the pleasant memories of my school-days, though I would do it willingly; but there are two incidents which show so clearly in the light of later years, that I record them. I see them distinctly. They make pictures in my mind. I can almost hear the voices speak again.

I have been swiftly brought from school by Major Hartley, with whom by this time I am quite familiar. Major Hartley is a sort of Captain Poyntz without Captain Poyntz's humour. He has a portentous drawl and a big moustache, and he swaggers a little in his gait. He takes me on fishing and shooting

expeditions in the holidays; and last season I rode to hounds beside him. He tips me with outrageous generosity, and tells me stories of the Crimean War. He is not a good teller of tales; but my imagination fills in much of the detail of his sterile stories, and I am always quite absorbed by his narrations. But we have been very silent all the way home, and the house is very silent now. The domestics go about their duties noiselessly, like ghosts in livery. Everybody speaks with subdued voice; and I, though I notice all these things with the keenest observation, am stricken through with grief. For the sad message that has brought me here is that Maud is at death's door, and that there is little hope for her. The medical man of Wrethedale is in consultation with a physician from the county town. They are clothed in black, and look to my frightened eyes like Death's heralds. I am admitted, on promise of outward calmness, to Maud's chamber, and see her lying asleep, wan and fragile. Uncle Ben meets me at the door, and I see that his whole face is red, as if it had been scalded. He makes no concealment of his grief; and when he takes me on his knee in his own room,

he puts his handkerchief over his face and cries unrestrainedly. I am too stonily cold in my grief to cry at all, and think myself terribly hard-hearted and unfeeling. I tell myself all that Maud has been to me, and how dearly I ought to love her, and still sit there cold and stony while Uncle Ben cries behind his handkerchief; and I can do nothing but look at a great miserable gap in the world which nothing can ever fill again. And a voice which is no part of me at all, says distinctly and keeps on saying, 'I don't care;' and though I strive against it with abhorrence, it will not be silent. I grow to feel so fearfully wicked under the iteration of this inward voice, that I become quite frightened at myself, and sit there whilst Uncle Ben's grief flows on, and feel stonier and colder every minute. At length a tap is heard at the door, and I rise and answer it.

'Mr. Hartley is inside, sir,' whispers the domestic to some one outside the door; whereupon a very tall, broad-shouldered man with iron-grey hair, and a nose like an eagle's beak, nods in answer, enters the room, and lays a hand on Uncle Ben's shoulder.

'Is that you, Brand?' says Uncle Ben, rising from his chair. 'The other doctors

are here, but I haven't got a lot o' faith in 'em. Come and see her.'

'Take me to the doctors, first,' says the new-comer; and Uncle Ben and he leave the room together. Then comes a long interval of silence, and I am left alone. I can hear one of the dogs whining in the kennels, for my uncle's room is at the back of the great house; and I think of the superstition which accredits animals with a foreknowledge of human death. After a great lapse of time, a female servant enters and makes up the fire; for Uncle Ben will have all domestic offices performed by women, and keeps up the tribe of menials in plush for service at the table and for show. I venture to ask her if the new doctors hold out any hope; but she does not know, and steals away again as silently as she came. I wait a long time with a growing sense of fear, accusing myself all the while for the wicked want of feeling. Then the new doctor returns alone, not observing me at all, as I sit at the window looking out upon the night, which is calm and clear and cold. He seats himself with his back towards me, and lights a cigar and smokes it. I can see the dull red reflected

in the polished marble of the mantel-piece, and the smoke that curls above the chair in which the doctor lounges. I want desperately to ask him the question which I put to the housemaid; but that accusing voice within me goes on saying, 'I don't care;' and I seem to have been so long silent and unnoticed that I am afraid to speak. Then after another lapse of time, a tap comes to the door again, and the doctor throws his cigar into the fire and walks out of the room; and with my stony misery still upon me, I fall asleep in my chair, until voices awake me.

'Where is Mr. Hartley?' asks one voice; and looking up, I see that the doctor has returned, and that Cousin Will is with him.

'In his bedroom, and waiting anxiously to see you,' answers Cousin Will; and the doctor makes a movement to the door. But Will laying a restraining hand upon his arm, he turns round and faces him, looking down from under projecting brows. 'What,' asks Cousin Will, 'is your opinion of—the case?'

'Serious,' says the doctor; 'but there is ample room for hope.' With that he leaves the room; and I see Cousin Will fall upon his knees beside an arm-chair and bury his

face within his hands. And for myself, at that good news, I only know that the false accusing voice within me goes silent suddenly, and that I weep for relief and hope, as I have never wept before.

Two weeks later, I am back at school with an egregious gratuity from Uncle Ben. Maud is recovering rapidly; and what with my joy at that, and the gleeful excitement with which I find myself richer in the middle of the school-term than ever golden Midas was in his auriferous life, I am supremely contented, and the days race after one another till they bring the Christmas holidays.

Other pictures take form and colour before me, and there are other voices in my ear. It is my fifteenth birthday. Gascoigne is at the head of the school. Gregory minor is Gregory major now, and only one behind Gascoigne in the race. I lie upon the grass under the shadow of the beech-trees. It is night-time, and the moon is glorious; and across the field in the woods beyond the river the nightingale is singing. I lie alone, heedless of damp grass; and I travel in thought through such a life as only an eager lad can live in his

dreams. *On n'a pas toujours quinze ans*, sings Suzanne, and at fifteen one has a right to one's dreams. I recall the scene almost as if it were a spectacle in a theatre. The solemn beech-trees are alive with light at the edges of their masses of dark foliage. There is a visible nimbus about the meanest object in sight, and the nightingale sings. Over my dream and through the story of the nightingale, steals a serious voice which comes nearer as it speaks. I know the voice for that of the headmaster. His companion is tall and slight, but manly in figure; and as they go by at a distance of twenty yards perhaps, I think it ridiculous when the figure looks like Gascoigne's. Gascoigne is a prosperous scholar, and a great deity of mine; but there are limits even to my beliefs in *him*, and I can scarcely dream of him—dreamer as I am—as walking in intimate talk with our head-master. Whilst I wonder, the headmaster turns, and Gascoigne—for it is he—turns with him. The master's voice comes clear and solemn to where I lie in the grass, and my heart beats with half-a-score of emotions at once—sorrowful and joyful.

'You leave to-morrow, then,' says the head-

master; 'and you carry my hopes and prayers with you. Your career at school has been an exceptionally brilliant one, and you have proved that you are a master of exceptional qualities. There is only one way with those qualities, if you would prosper with them and make them useful.' The measured tones and the measured step fall into the distance together, and after an interim, return. 'Good-bye, then,' says the master, pausing once more opposite my unseen post, and turning towards his own residence. 'I will keep the high hopes I had of you. I am more than willing to believe in you. There may come a time in your career, Gascoigne, when gentle dealing may seem out of place, and strict justice may claim her own more rigidly. But the scales will not be in my hands then. Take care that I have never to throw into them the weight which I reserve to-day. Good-bye.'

With no farewell from Gascoigne's lips, the master moves on towards his own house. His step dies in silence on the turf, and I lose his form in shadow. Now Gascoigne is down upon his face, and I can hear him moaning. What—what is this? What shadow of disgrace or grief is here? I dare

guess nothing, dare fear nothing. And the memory haunts me like a nightmare through the day which follows, and through the next, and through the long vacation which succeeds it. Gascoigne has gone one day before his time, without good-byes to any; and his friends are chagrined, but not suspicious. And only he knows what casts that shadow which *will* fall between himself and me, though all my soul rebels against it.

Gregory major held the position of school-chief for a year, and left at the end of it for Exeter, Oxford. But before he went, Uncle Ben—who had heard of him from me a thousand times—would needs have him at Hartley Hall; and we arranged it so that we travelled down from school together. On the way down, Æsop amongst many other things spoke of my uncle's wealth, and said that the common legend went that he was made of money. I answered that he was not at all a metallic sort of a man, but honest flesh and blood, and lovable. In that case, Æsop declared he'd get to know the Bloke, and bleed him for a comic paper.

'Think of getting paid for making jokes,

young un! Think of all the jokes I've made in my time, and never had so much as a "Thank you" for! I've been kicked, cuffed, and caned for 'em—I've been at school arraigned for 'em—I've often been disdained for 'em—my character I've stained for 'em—I've many a time been pained for 'em—but I've never been paid for 'em in all my life. If I were editor of *Punch*, I wouldn't swop berths with the Emperor of China. You'll see me go at the old fogy,' said Æsop, 'a perfect bee-line.'

Knowing what I did of Æsop's rugged manliness of character, knowing how he stuck by a friend, and how gentle he was at the bottom of all his roughness and his jollity, I was more than a little pained by his behaviour when we reached the station at Wrethedale. Who should be on the platform with Uncle Ben but Gascoigne? I leaped out of the carriage to greet him, and called out to Gregory that Gascoigne was here.

'Yes,' he said; 'I see;' and busied himself among the belongings he had stowed away in the railway carriage. When he alighted, he had nothing but a nod of the head and a rather sullen 'How d'ye do?'

for Gascoigne. My hero himself looked a little disconcerted at Gregory's coming, I thought; and Uncle Ben that evening called me up to his study, and after a number of minor questions, asked me if I had not told him that the two old school-fellows were fast friends.

'They used to be,' I answered in some dismay.

'Never mind,' said Uncle Ben. 'Boys will be boys; and what they'd have to be if they couldn't be boys, I *don't* know. They've had a bit of a quarrel, I suppose. Leave 'em alone together, and it'll all come right. They're fine young chaps both of 'em, and as thoroughbred a pair as I'd wish to look at. You take pattern by 'em, Johnny; and remember above all things as they're your guests and not mine, and that you've got to do your best to please 'em. You'll find a plaything in that pocket-book as 'll amuse you as long as they're here, I daresay. And now—off you go! You'll find 'em in the billiard-room.'

I discovered on my way to the billiard-room that the 'plaything' spoken of by Uncle Ben was a cheque on the Hetherton Bank; and

Gascoigne went with me the next day to cash it. Mr. Crisp the manager invited us into his own room and proffered refreshment; and as I left the bank, I heard one man say to another as they waited at the counter, 'The one in the turn-down collar's a nevvy of the millionaire's. Hartley — Hartley Hall, you know.'

'*I* know,' said the other; and I felt as if their eyes burned my back as I walked out at the swinging doors. We had ridden over attended by a groom; and quite a little crowd assembled to see us mount and start again.

Gascoigne laughed, and said, 'You are a prince in your own country, Jack.'

I should have made an answer, I suppose, but that I saw something at that minute which put all thought even of Gascoigne from my mind. It was no less than Mr. Fairholt's carriage, and in it sat Aunt Bertha and Cousin Will and Polly. That I should dare to call her Polly, even in writing, seems in the memory of that hour a wild presumption. Ay! I may laugh now, if I will; but I remember how, after bowing to the carriage generally, and exchanging greetings with Cousin Will and Aunt Bertha, I asked with a beating

heart after the health of Miss Fairholt, and trembled at the sound of my own voice.

'Meaning me? said Polly, with her eyes dancing. 'How very droll!'

Aunt Bertha had always insisted that a certain portion of my holidays should be given up to her; and I had spent a yearly month with her at seaside places; but I had never passed the doors of Mr. Fairholt's house since I had ceased to live there. In these early excursions, Polly had been Aunt Bertha's constant companion, and we had naturally been a great deal together. I had always been her submissive slave from the hour of my first capture; and now these long absences had brought timidity on top of helpless bondage. I cannot remember that I was up to this time at all under dominion of dress. That hard rule came later; but I know that at the moment at which I encountered Polly, every article of my attire seemed to have undergone some fateful change. My collar was rumpled and refused to sit, my boots were soiled, my riding-trousers were splashed to the knee, my jacket held my arms in awkward fetters. The very horse I sat had, to my changed and dispirited fancy, a besmeared and disorderly look.

I resented the presence of the groom. What did I want a groom for, as though I were a girl, and not to be trusted on horseback without a man to take care of me? I would not by comparison have cared for an army of critics, though public notice of any sort was a burden in those days not lightly to be borne; but Polly's briefest glance dismayed me.

She was very pretty, fresh, dainty, charming—all these things Gascoigne said of her as we rode homewards. What were these praises to me? I believe from my memory of my own sensations that if I *could* have found a phrase, or found the sense to hunt for a phrase, to describe her as she afflicted me, I should have called her a delicious avalanche. I felt like that. She *was* delicious; and her presence fell upon me, crushed me, broke me, buried me. Absence resuscitated me; and I longed again to be in her presence, and being there, was again crushed, broken and buried. There came a time afterwards when Macassar oil made me feel less unworthy of her, and an embroidered and scented handkerchief brought some solace to my soul. But this was not so, as yet.

When Polly asked me if I had called her

Miss Fairholt, and said, 'How very droll!' I felt in my crushed and broken and buried way, that that was a good sign, and that it might please me when I came to life again. Then I told myself, No, it wasn't. Girls who cared for a fellow were always coy. That was how I put it to myself. It remained as a natural conclusion that Polly did not care for me; and my views of the world became intensely misanthropic and gloomy accordingly. If any man chooses to think that I exaggerate in remembering, I defy him. I have never been more in earnest in my life than I was then. I have lain in the under-the-avalanche condition for a day at a time, and have had no other wish than to publish a volume of poems, and straightway die and be buried in the moss-grown church-yard. I told Polly of this aspiration once; and she said in her imperious and elderly way that I was a foolish boy, and was not to talk nonsense. I went back to the house—we were at Scarborough at that time, I remember—and wrote a broken-hearted set of verses, of which all that I can remember is that one line ran thus:—

'This seemed to childhood's eyes the time of gold;'

and that it rhymed to this :—

'I only feel that I am growing old :'

I know that these were the second and fourth lines of a verse ; but what went before and between them, I know no more than Adam. I wrote another set of verses at this time, beginning with—

' Let the mad world prate on of youthful folly ;'

but I can recall nothing further. I gather from it, however, an idea that I was under some sort of impression that the peoples of the globe either were or would be interested in my views about things, and that I despised those peoples, and wished to let them know it.

The result of this meeting in the street in Hetherton was an invitation for Gascoigne, Gregory, and myself to Island Hall. Cousin Will himself informally conveyed the invitation, and held out prospects of a dance. I have reason to believe that both my friends were at this time in love with Maud, and that they accepted the invitation chiefly because she was going, and because they hoped to dance with her. Mr. Fairholt—so Will said at the luncheon-table—would spend the day and night at Wrethedale, in order to be out

of the way. Uncle Ben being a good deal pressed, begged himself off for the morning, but promised to attend the garden-party in the afternoon. It was to be an assemblage of boys and girls, with a sprinkling of older people, and some half-dozen young ladies, who were to be imported, as it appeared, for the especial benefit of Gregory and Gascoigne. I looked forward to the day with that eager tremor which always awoke at the bare thought of meeting Polly, and with a conviction that I should on this occasion do something or other which should decide my fate. I resolved that I would be avalanched no more, and that I would be as gay and unembarrassed in her presence as anybody else could be.

The day came, broiling hot, with just a light wind from the west, which tempered the sun a little. We bowled along the broad white road, past the undulating meadows and the stretch of river, where the cattle stood udder-deep, switching their tails at the flies—a luxurious picture on a day like this—and into that reach of road where for half a mile, the trees, a living gallery, roofed us in. Then out of its sweet green gloom we came

suddenly into the sunlight again, swept once into shadow, and again swiftly into sunshine. I leapt from the carriage, half-blind with the glory of the light, and walked into the hall, where everything lay in a softly shaded coolness. All was dark for a moment; but I could see descending the stair a something in white, which moved leisurely towards me. I knew Polly's voice; and by the time she had reached me, my eyes were accustomed to the shaded light, and I could see her. She laughed bewitchingly, and courtesied to me. She was dressed in white, as I have said already; and her hair was twined with flowers, that sat upon her regal little head like a diadem.

'How do I look?' she asked, turning a pirouette, that I might have a complete view all round. She asked the question just as she would have said, 'How do you do?'

'Beautiful!' I cried, and clasped my hands. There was such a fervour in the tone that Polly blushed. I meant it then, and I endorse the verdict now. I can see the dear little figure in the cool shaded air. It seems as if I had but to turn my head to see my companions helping Maud from the carriage,

one to each hand. The blinding sunlight on the gravel, the cool green of the shrubs upon the lawn beyond the path, and then the belt of elms where the air looked like deep green sea-water in the shade—these are not fancies. I see them as clearly as if with my bodily eyes. Dear little face flower-crowned, and dainty figure clad in pure soft white—I see no lifeless portrait, but yourselves! I see my old self less clearly, but I feel his spirit awake in me again. How pure a worship, how honest a devotion! How, in spite of all perpetrated follies of boyish verse and speech, *that* was the fount at which I drank my purest draught of hope, from which I filled my pitcher for the desert when my time came to sojourn there. You know no change, dear face and dainty figure, in my changeful mind; and though I am unfaithful to the loftier hopes my early worship bred within my soul, I am faithful to my memories of youth and you. But the hopes are withered, like the flowers you wore.

But where were my resolves? Gone! borne down by the resistless pressure of my own feelings. Gay? unembarrassed? Could Cheops have danced beneath the load of his own pyramid?

I was very near taking Æsop into my confidence, when we had reached home in the evening, for I felt as swollen with my secret as the Duke of Clarence did in his dream of drowning. I held it in, however, by almost superhuman effort, and confined myself to some general statements to the effect that when I went into the world I would make a plunge to do something or other, and that there seemed nothing so enviable to me as to die gloriously in battle. To which Æsop responded by an adaptation of the words of Mr. Tennyson, who, curiously enough, was at that time his favourite author:

> 'Yea [Simeon] thy dream is good;
> It is the stirring of the blood
> While thou abidest in the bud.'

He left me at Gascoigne's call; and I wandered down the drive in the darkness to where the lamps blazed above the great gates by the lodge. There a voice from the road called out, 'Hi! young gentel-man!' and a man came into the range of light and stood outside the gate.

'What do you want?' I asked.

He answered my question by another, 'Do you live in the house?'

I answered that I did, and repeated my question.

'Are you anything to Mr. Hardley?' he asked again.

'Yes,' I answered; 'I am his nephew. What do you want?'

'Misder Hardley,' he said, 'was my baydron once. I zerved him for vive years; and zince he has left me, look and zee what I am begome. I have zent him many ledders, and he does not rebly. I have walked from London, and I ztarve. I have not dasted food for two days. Haf pity, little gentelman—haf pity! Sbeak to Misder Hardley for me. If he knew to what I had gome, he would haf mercy.'

I believe that was the first appeal that was ever made to me, and it touched me nearly. 'What is your name?' I asked him.

'My name,' he said, 'is Tasker. I zerved your uncle for vive years. I was his gonfidential agent in London. I am ztarving. I haf not one penny. Haf pity, little gentelman!'

I gave the man a sovereign; for which he called down extravagant blessings upon me. I suppose that howsoever pliable he might have

hoped to find me, he had scarcely expected that I should prove so wealthy. When he had blessed me out of breath, I bade him wait until I told Mr. Hartley that he was there. I ran up the drive, and came breathless into the house, and panted out the story before them all—Uncle Ben and Maud and Gascoigne and Æsop. For the first time in my life, I saw Uncle Ben angry. His eyes grew small and fierce, and the veins rose thickly in his forehead as he tugged again and again at the bell-rope.

'Go down to the gates,' he shouted to the footman, 'and take one or two of the stable-helpers with you. You'll find a German blackguard there, a-askin' to see me. Flog him away. Break every bone in the rascal's body.'

The footman stood amazed; and Gascoigne and Gregory stared with open eyes.

Maud rose from her seat and touched Uncle Ben on the arm. 'Let me give these orders, uncle,' she said pleadingly.

He resumed his seat gasping and red in the face, and sat mopping his bald forehead with his handkerchief.

'Go down to the gate,' Maud said, 'and tell

the man who waits outside that it is quite hopeless that he should expect Mr. Hartley to forgive him, and tell him to go away.'

The footman bowed and turned to go.

'Wait a bit!' shouted Uncle Ben. 'Did he say as he was starvin', Johnny?'

'Yes,' I answered.

'Then come with me,' said Uncle Ben, 'and let's have a look at him.' He beckoned to the footman to follow—took up a hat in the hall, and walked to the gates. The man still hung about there; and Uncle Ben stopped and asked me in an undertone if I had a sovereign in my pocket. I answered that I had; and he whispered to me to stop behind, and give it to the man, but to tell him that it would not be safe for him to be seen about the place again. Having arranged this little plan, he advanced to the gate, and addressed the man who stood without. Uncle Ben's speech was couched in very uncompromising language, and the petitioner listened to it and made no reply.

'You wolfish shark!' said Uncle Ben, 'you dare to come to me—do you? After driving a friend of mine to ruin, a gentleman, and breakin' half a score of people's hearts, and

after being let off by me in a manner as might ha' transported you. · Get out, you villain! If ever I see you near my place again, I'll have the dogs set on you! Off you go!'

The man shrunk off; and as he went, I beckoned him to stay. Uncle Ben saw the sign, but of course took no notice of it. I slipped the sovereign into the hand stretched through the bars, and said that he had better go far away. He touched the rim of his battered hat and disappeared.

When I overtook Uncle Ben in the drive, he laid his hand upon my shoulder, and said, 'That's the feller, Johnny, as drove poor Frank Fairholt to ruin, more than eight years ago. He was a money-lender, and the poor lad borrowed money of him. Now let me speak to you serious.' He paused, and faced me. 'If ever you want for money, come to me. If you've got yourself into a scrape through evil conduct, and want money to get out of it, still come to me. For as I'm a livin' sinner, Johnny, if ever anybody as depends on me was to put his name to a bill for a money-lender, I'd disown him. Remember that, Johnny: if ever you put your name

across a bill for anything or anybody, self or friend, I've done with you for ever!'

I had never seen him more in earnest. But he gave me that advice often afterwards when I began to go into the world and understood it better, and gave it always with the same solemnity.

END OF VOL. II.

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